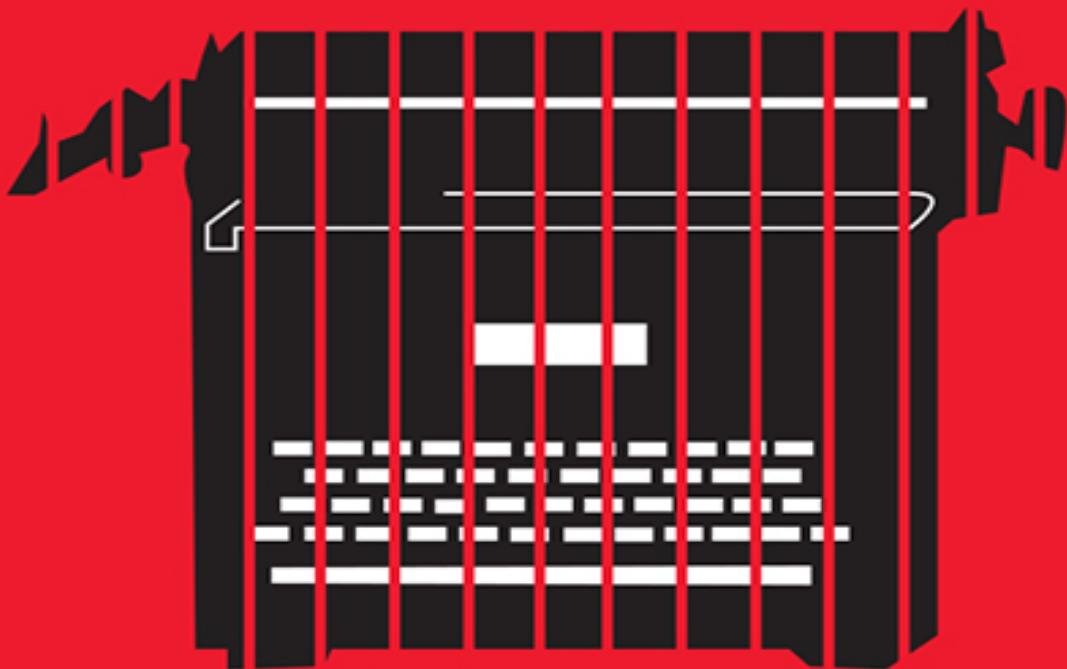


with a new introduction by the author

James McGrath Morris



Jailhouse Journalism

The Fourth Estate Behind Bars

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Read the prison press if you would like to know what a terrible mistake
we are making in maintaining a system that operates to waste men
instead of conserving their powers in freedom for the benefit of society.

— William M. Reedy
St. Louis Mirror, February 22, 1912

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Introduction to the Transaction Edition

In the spring of 2000, Washington State Representative Ida Ballasiotes decided that if the courts were unwilling to restrict the *Prison Legal News* (*PLN*) edited by inmate Paul Wright at the McNeil Island Corrections Center (see [Chapter 19](#)), she could certainly try to put a damper on one of its main sources of damaging news. Ballasiotes, who entered politics after her daughter was killed by a work-release inmate in Seattle in 1988, was no friend of the incarcerated and a frequent target of Wright's vituperative pen. For a decade, the irksome Wright had written muckraking stories about the Washington Department of Corrections documented with records obtained through the state's freedom of information laws. Ballasiotes now sought to dose that spigot by persuading her fellow lawmakers to make it illegal for inmates to request state records, except for their own criminal case records.¹ The gesture, though ill-fated, was only the most recent in a long series of salvos between Ballasiotes, the co-chair of the Washington State House Criminal Justice and Corrections Committee, and Wright, a convicted murderer and one of the nation's best-known prison journalists. Even if she had succeeded in her effort, it would not have stopped Wright, whose wife, or legions of friends on the outside, would have filed the public-records requests for him. The effort, nonetheless, reflected the frustration Wright's opponents felt after a decade of doing battle with this new hybrid of the prison press—a publication produced for and by inmates but with enough of a footing outside the walls to put it beyond the reach of prison administrators.

Because it is manufactured outside the confines of prison, *PLN* is unlike any previous incarnations of jailhouse journalism. It could, and can, with the help of good lawyers, take advantage of the legal protections given to regular (read: non-prison) periodicals. Wright, having it printed in this fashion, overcame the main cause of the demise of America's best prison newspapers in the 1970s and 1980s. There were no plugs to pull, no presses

to remove, no offices to lock up, no budget lines to cut. *PLN* lives independently of the state, its funding, or even its authorization. “They haven’t been able to come right out and censor us,” said Wright, “but they nibble around the edges.”² Until *PLN*, the only other independent-minded prison periodical to survive the wave of repression that all but killed the prison press in the late twentieth century had been the *Angolite* (see [Chapter 16](#)) in Louisiana. But the latter owed its survival to enlightened prison keepers. *PLN* was simply a new breed.

PLN’s new approach did not make its ascent to the second largest circulating prison publication easy. Since it was launched in 1990, *PLN* has weathered a continuous barrage of censorship. Its first three issues, thin photocopied newsletters were banned in all Washington prisons, and guards ransacked Wright’s cell, removing all his writing materials. Wright and his then-partner Ed Mead prepared a lawsuit to stop the censorship, but their challenge became moot when Washington prison officials relented, returned Wright’s belongings, and agreed to permit *PLN* to circulate in state prisons. This victory marked the first time in more than two decades that an inmate publication used the courts successfully to ward off state interference (see [Chapter 17](#))—though granted it was only a threat to use the courts that paid off. Nonetheless, Wright’s action established a pattern for *PLN*. It would be willing to use legal recourse, when administrative remedies failed, to fight off censorship. In following this course, *PLN*, by the end of the 1990s, grew to become the most important and visible advocate of inmate legal rights in the nation working from within the prison system.

It was a path fraught with risk, and seemingly required, at times, the skills of a high wire act. In 1991, for instance, *PLN* prepared to publish an account of prison guard brutality witnessed by fourteen inmates. Wright was threatened with twenty days confinement in the hole (solitary), and possibly losing thirty days in good time off his sentence after officials viewed a draft of the article. The finished copies of *PLN* that came in the mail, though, did contain the unexpurgated account. Under the peculiarities of the prison rules, the officials felt barred from taking an action against Wright after already having raised—and dropped—the issue earlier. Instead, they took out their scissors and cut the article out before delivering the issue to each in-prison subscriber. Responding to a demand for an explanation, Larry Kincheloe, Washington State Prison Director, wrote that the page was cut out because it posed “reasonable risk of violence and physical harm to a

human being and that distribution of the offending page would have been “inciteful.”³

As *PLN* grew into a full-fledged magazine, with subscribers in each of the fifty states, it became increasingly difficult for state corrections officials to repeat the 1991 incident. In the decade since, *PLN* went to court at least ten times. Unlike with previous prison publications, the legal actions taken did not bring into question *PLN*’s right to publish the material—as *PLN* is published outside of prison this was not an issue. In and of itself, this put *PLN* way ahead in the maze of the legal challenges that have historically faced inmate publications. The cases instead centered on the rights of the subscribers. On that score there was considerably more legal precedent in *PLN*’s favor. Overall, the courts have supported censorship of incoming mail only if it finds that it furthers a compelling governmental interest. In other words, denying an inmate his or her copy of *PLN* must be based on a substantial security or rehabilitation concern. With subscribers that include judges, state attorneys general, and legislators, *PLN*’s visibility within the legal community works to its favor when a court adjudicates such a case. Judges are often familiar with *PLN* editorial content and thus are less easily swayed by the arguments made by corrections officials that the paper poses a danger to prison order.

Not that prison keepers have not tried. In 1994, the Washington State Airway Heights Correctional Center banned all third and fourth class mail. In 1995 a Utah subscriber was transferred from one state prison to another facility that banned all publications. In 1998, Michigan prisons banned a book that contained *PLN* articles. In 1999, Nevada authorities refused to deliver copies of *PLN* to subscribers in their prisons. In each of these cases, with the assistance of pro bono attorneys, *PLN* prevailed in court. In the Nevada case, for instance, prison officials agreed to pay *PLN* \$5,000 in damages and provide a one-year set of back issues and a one-year subscription extension to each inmate whose subscriptions were interrupted after U.S. District Court Judge Howard McKibben ruled in favor of the publication.⁴

As of 2001, *PLN* has yet to lose a case. “Certain states have established an aggressive vendetta against *PLN* and Paul Wright and they’ll do or say just about anything to get it censored,” said Mickey Gandler, a civil rights attorney in Seattle. “It makes what he’s achieved all the more remarkable.”⁵ The legal talent Wright called to his aid was also considerably stronger than

that which previous inmate journalists could tap. In fact, Wright ascribes PLN's success to the team of attorneys recruited from its subscription list.

Also contributing to its legal success has been a credibility matched only by the *Angolite*. "People may not like what we say," said Wright, "but so far no one has been able to say what we publish isn't true."⁶ Sometimes the praise comes from surprising quarters. Mike Williams, a former associate superintendent at the Washington State Reformatory, where Wright and Mead started PLN, said "the issues that he did take, you really had to take a close look at. Usually you'd have to say he had a better chance of winning an issue than the common jailhouse lawyer."⁷

While *PLN*'s legal success and the caliber of editorial content distinguishes it from previous prison publications, equally significant in evaluating *PLN*'s place in the history of penal journalism is its single-minded focus on law and politics and its leftwing perspective. The overtly political nature of *PLN* represents the emergence of something that previously had been confined to underground prison publications. But those were usually short-lived and circulated only in small numbers in the recesses of prisons. *PLN*, on the other hand, was the second leading circulating prison periodical in the nation in 2001. Averaging thirty pages an issue, *PLN* regularly publishes articles running between 3,000 and 8,000 words. A typical issue contains nineteen articles on legal issues ranging from Alabama counties being found not liable for jail conditions to Utah's rescinding its no-porn policy in prison, several very technical prison litigation reform articles, and a dozen assorted news stories and commentaries intended to raise one's dander. A subscriber can read a column by Mumia Abu-Jamal (more about him later) deriding the decision of a Pennsylvania District Attorney not to pursue criminal action against prison guards who were viewed on videotape "roughing up" inmates; one of a continuous series of reports on a California "super max" prison where fifty prisoners were shot by guards over a five year stretch; and a sarcastic narrative of how the Texas state flag flown over state buildings has for two decades been sewn by female prisoners.⁸

"When *PLN* started out in 1990 Ed and I had decided *PLN* would be a magazine of struggle, whether in the courts or elsewhere, and everything would be chronicled," explained Wright in an editorial in the tenth anniversary issue. "We set out with the goal of publishing real, timely news that activist prisoners could use."⁹ Its pages are replete with a class-based

approach to criminal justice. Nowhere is this more evident than in the PLN's long history of chronicling what it calls "prison slave labor."

"This is where the interest of prisoners and free world workers intersect at their most obvious," explained Wright. "If people outside prison didn't think criminal justice policies affect them, *PLN* would make prisons relevant by showing how prison slave labor took their jobs and undermined their wages."¹⁰ In 1998, a collection of articles from *PLN* were published as a book, which has since gone through three printings.¹¹ While its ideology makes *PLN* unique as a successful inmate-produced periodical, the championing of prisoner rights connects it with a long line of venerable inmate periodicals. Wright's contribution was to raise it from a rhetorical level, such as in that found in the old *Prison Mirror* or *New Era* (see [Chapters 5](#) and [8](#), respectively), to a new scholarly and legal niveau. Wright "is to prisoners' rights what some people were to feminism or to lesbianism or to gay rights," said Leonard Schroeter, a former head of Washington's branch of the American Civil Liberties Union.¹²

Wright's success, however, has not spawned a new wave of prison publications. Only a few have been created during the past decade. *Southland Prison News*, a monthly collection of news items about prisons in the South and East Coasts was started in 1997, and *Florida Prison Legal Perspectives (FPLP)*, a kind of Floridian clone of *PLN*, began publishing in 1994. Neither are as much an inmate-produced publication as *PLN*. While they both make wide use of inmate-produced material, *FPLP* is published by the Florida Prisoners Legal Aid Organization, Inc., and *Southland Prison News* is a publication of the Prison Media Fund.

Writing programs also continue to produce publications both in and out of prison featuring inmate work. For example, the Pacific News Service published *The Beat Within*, a weekly publication newsletter of writing and art by incarcerated youth in Northern California, and ran writing workshops for youthful inmates. The new in-prison publications started in the 1990s were more like *New Directions*, which was founded in 1997 at the Marshall County Correctional Facility in Holly Springs, Mississippi. *New Directions* contains poetry, mild editorial cartoons, puzzles, recipes (using items that one can purchase in the commissary), and a smattering of reprinted articles from outside newspapers.

As the twenty-first century opened, the success of *PLN* and the continued existence of the *Angolite* breathed new life into a moribund prison press.

The latter's editor, Wilbert Rideau, the most noted prison journalist of the late twentieth century, came several steps closer to winning release from the Louisiana State Penitentiary in Angola when in late 2000 one of his many appeals hit pay dirt. His 1961 murder conviction was reversed because the court deemed his indictment to have been unconstitutionally obtained from a grand jury whose composition violated the equal protection clause of the Fourteenth Amendment. He now faces the prospect of a new trial in which the odds will be more favorable by the passage of 30 years.

PLN and *the Angolite*, nonetheless, are the exceptions. Most of the now-defunct higher quality prison periodicals are, at best, vague memories among the lifers old enough to remember them. Even the few venerable publications that survived the rash of closings at the end of the last century faced new threats in the new one. In February 2001, for instance, the seventy-three-year-old *Echo*, published by inmates of the Texas prison system, was closed in a security crackdown following the highly-publicized escape of seven prisoners. Among the now-unemployed editors was Jorge Antonio Renaud, a former copy editor for the *Austin American Statesman*. Renaud accused correctional officials of using "security concerns" to suppress the *Echo*'s newfound resolute style of journalism inspired by the *Angolite* in neighboring Louisiana.

The dearth of prison publications is ironic in that the inmate population grew to record levels in the 1990s. By 1999, 1.8 million Americans were confined to prisons and jails. Prison conditions, such as overcrowding and frequent lockdowns, the high rate of illiteracy among inmates, and the success of prison officials in suppressing confrontational prison periodicals, are certainly part of the explanation for the absence of a strong prison press. "One of the things that's kind of sad is that, while prisons have proliferated, the prisoner press has gone downhill," said Wright. "That we have survived at all is amazing."¹³ Wright believes that political apathy is high among the reasons for decline. Prison officials might agree. Ken Ducharme, for instance, gave up worrying about *PLN* in the mid-1990s when he was head of the Washington State Reformatory. "Their (*PLN*) issues don't generate a lot of inmate involvement in this prison, or even the state of Washington," he declared in the 1995. "We watch very carefully what they do... and the newsletter does have a Communist tone to it, but there's not too many of those folks around in prison anymore."¹⁴ Whatever the reason, traditional prison journalism remained a dying form of media in the 1990s. In other

words, the zenith of prison journalism has come and gone and its story remains primarily one for the history shelves. Perhaps its next chapter will be found in the electronic media.

With his fame growing, Wright himself, in 1998, experimented with other media. He began a weekly radio program on KPFA, the Pacifica radio station in San Francisco, based on *PLN* reports. The show lasted two years before Wright gave it up to concentrate on his magazine. Interestingly, Wright's presence on radio in the late 1990s garnered less attention than the previous *non-appearance* of another prison journalist connected with *PLN*. Mumia Abu-Jamal, perhaps the most preeminent writer behind bars during the past decade, was a contributor to *PLN* before his current celebrity (or notoriety). Convicted for the 1981 murder of a Philadelphia police officer, Abu-Jamal is unlike most prison journalists in that he was a professional journalist before being sent to prison. Born Wesley Cook, Abu-Jamal began his journalism career at age 15 when he joined the Black Panther Party and was made Minister of Information for the Philadelphia chapter. He parlayed his youthful start into a radio career, and by age 25 was among the best known radio personalities in Philadelphia, winning a Peabody Award for his coverage of the Pope's visit to the city of Brotherly Love.

His murder trial—a peculiar affair in which, among other things, Abu-Jamal never took the stand and was represented by an attorney who has since been disbarred—became a cause celebre for opponents of the death penalty around the world. In 1994, National Public Radio (NPR) commissioned Abu-Jamal to record a series of commentaries. After recording several segments, and as the air date approached, a campaign led by friends and family of the slain police officer and conservative politicians sprang up to block their airing. When powerful politicians, such as then Senate Majority Leader Robert Dole entered the fray, NPR decided to kill the program to save its budget. “I’m all for diversity on the airwaves,” said Senator Dole in a floor speech, “but those commentaries would have sent the wrong message at the wrong time. The last time I checked we were trying to fight crime, not subsidize it or promote the fortunes of convicted murderers through taxpayer supported public broadcasting.”¹⁵

Following NPR’s decision drop air Abu-Jamal’s commentaries, it was announced that they would air on the Pacifica Network. A purveyor of alternative news with a strong emphasis on First Amendment issues and leftist politics, Pacifica is an alliance of radio stations that originated with

KPFA, the nation's first listener-supported radio station begun in Berkeley, California in 1949. Three years later another batch of commentaries were recorded, just before the state of Pennsylvania banned video or tape recording of its inmates. The new set of commentaries again stirred the political pot and Temple University cancelled its contract to carry Pacifica material on its radio station.

Radio was not the only electronic form of media to which inmate journalists have looked in past decade. They have also turned to the Internet. But, while the Internet has profoundly altered the media, it has had little overall effect on prison media. The reason is simple. Inmates are barred in virtually all circumstances from accessing the Internet. Congress, for example, passed a law prohibiting federal inmates from having access to the web. *PLN* editor Wright, who entered prison years before the terms "dot-com" or "homepage" became part of everyday language, has never seen a website nor sent an email.

Nevertheless, prison journalism has reached the web. *PLN* launched its website in 1998. In 2001 it featured the contents of several back issues, and plans are underway to begin posting entire issues and soon thereafter launch a prisoner rights database.¹⁶ The website made it easier for *PLN* to connect with readers in the outside word and may help garner support in its fight against censorship. For example, in the spring of 1999, *PLN* teamed up with Jennifer Vogel, a freelance journalist, to write an article on the activities of white supremacists among Department of Corrections employees in Western Washington. The article was based, in part, on a 390-page report that Wright obtained through one of his continuous Public Disclosure Act requests that so incensed Ballasiotes. When *PLN* and the *Seattle Weekly* both published the story, state authorities ordered that those editions of the publications be declared contraband in all Washington prisons. A federal judge upheld the ban and the case was being appealed in early 2001. The article was then posted in its entirety on the *PLN* website with the following notice:

The article is reproduced here in its entirety. Judge for yourself if the article is "racist" or if Mr. Vail [a high state prison official] is merely attempting to conceal what Washington prisoners already know: that Mr. Vail and other senior DOC officials condone and abet the racist and white supremacist activities of their employees. Only through Orwellian double speak can a balanced exposé of Nazi prison guards be called "racist."¹⁷

But while the web permits *PLN* to widely publicize the efforts of Washington state prison officials to suppress its reporting, *PLN*'s presence on the Internet does not improve its ability to reach its imprisoned readership. That struggle continues to involve ink, paper, and court rulings.

The Internet spawned two new prison publications. *The Prisoner's Perspective* was launched in 1997, and the *Cell Door* in 1999.¹⁸ Both are wired-versions of okU fashioned prison periodicals, offering a Whitman's sampler of prison fiction, poetry, newsy articles about life behind bars, illustrations, cartoons and humor. Both are compiled and posted by people outside of prison from materials submitted by inmates. The *Cell Door*, for instance, is produced by a group of prison activists in Maine.

Additionally, the web has permitted a notorious resident of San Querrtin's death row to garner a large worldwide audience for his writing. Starting in 1996, Dean Philip Carter, a convicted murderer of four women, has held court on a website called *Deadman Talkin*, first launched by a San Francisco disk jockey.¹⁹ This site, which averages one hundred visits per day, has grown to include nearly thirty columns and a busy letters section, in which Carter answers mails from readers. The columns, also translated into Dutch, German, French, Italian, and Spanish, focus primarily on life on death row and commentary on death penalty politics. Carter's work is immensely similar to that found in the prison press during its heyday—mostly impressionistic and sometimes poignantly reflective—such as in this passage in which Carter talks about his short visits to the prison yard:

Everyday that I went to the yard, I would end up leaning against the wall. As I leaned there, I could watch what was going on around me. At the end of the row of yard compounds is where the Gas Chamber is located. Sticking out of the roof of the Chamber is a huge green pipe, used to vent the poison gas after an execution is carried out. I would catch myself staring at this pipe everyday and wondering if that pipe would someday be venting the poison gas used to execute me. It was soon after this that I decided that I didn't really want to hang out in the yard any longer.

Later,

*Dean*²⁰

Carter does all his writing on a typewriter and sees his email only on paper. This fact underlies the irony of prison journalism on the Internet. While it can, and has, vastly expanded the audience for prison journalism, its presence in cyberspace does nothing for its cardinal audience. *PLN* and

Carter's site are like resistance publications in a totalitarian regime that are read only by residents of democracies: useful in spreading the word, but useless to the resistors.

The arrival of *PLN*, Carter, and others on the web has been controversial, as was Abu-Jamal's presence on the radio. Victim advocates have been riled. The father of one of Carter's victims for a short time maintained a website called *Justice Against Crime Talking*.²¹ The presence of prison journalists on the Internet has also been lumped by critics with the proliferation of prison personal ads and inmate web pages. The Canadian Coalition Against the Death Penalty hosts more than 300 websites for U.S. inmates awaiting the death penalty, while other websites post information about prisoners seeking pen-pals, often featuring alluring come-hither photographs of female inmates and muscular male inmates. "For them to have access to the general public is outrageous," said Susan Fischer of the California Doris Tate Crime Victims Bureau.²²

The controversy over inmates' access to radio broadcasts or the web is only a new version of an age-old conflict concerning the extent to which those who break the law lose their right of free expression. It has always been at the heart of the debate over prison journalism since the erection of the modern prison in the 1800s. Historically, the Supreme Court has granted a preferred status to the First Amendment, giving it preference when two or more rights conflict, such as in the case of a defendant's right to a free trial and the press's right to cover it. But a combination of factors have continued to restrict the willingness of courts to protect the same First Amendment rights of inmates.

First, there is a widespread support for the notion that one who commits a crime relinquishes most of his or her political rights. For example, most states strip convicted felons of their right to vote. Those rights that continue to be supported by the population as a whole, such as the right to appeal, have to do with notions of fair play. The right to vote or the right to speak freely are thus regarded as superfluous for a convict. This, of course, is a non-sequitur. The authors of First Amendment did not extend free speech conditionally on good conduct. In fact, one might argue that the Amendment exists out of a fear that the government might take it upon itself to determine who could and who could not express themselves freely.

Second, the court system gives tremendous deference to corrections officials, presuming that their expertise in running their respective

institutions is greater than that of judges. The compelling government interest—an important legal concept—of keeping prisons secure has given license for officials to run roughshod over the inmate press. In following this legal concept, the court has renounced its historic role as protector of the First Amendment in all but the most egregious cases, further eroding inmates' belief in the fairness of the judiciary.

Third, inmates, by their very nature, are poor advocates for their own interests. By far, the largest portion of the prison population is drawn from the lower socioeconomic strata of society. Poorly educated, continually denied, they have low political efficacy making their apathy understandable. A functioning free inmate press could provide a living example of how basic liberties can permit those without power to prevail in some instances.

The argument made in this book when it was first published has lost none of its currency. All but a few of whom we send to prison will eventually return to society. Freedom of speech, the fundamental liberty of our society, is not solely a legal concept. It should be a habit of mind integral to our society—but is of little value unless supported by a shared cultural belief system. To make it a luxury reserved only for those who obey the rules lessens its centrality, fails to prepare those in prison for the responsibilities of a free society, and, at the heart of it, deprives them of the basic human right of self-expression. We withhold from ourselves something of great value when we deny others that right. We deny ourselves the right to hear what they have to say.

James McGrath Morris

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Preface

This book posed a number of writing challenges. First, not much is written about this little-known aspect of American penal history. The only book is Russell Baird's *The Penal Press*, which was published in 1967. Baird wrote a pioneering work, but because he was a professor of journalism, he provided more of an analysis of the penal press than a history. In fact, Baird's work contained only a single chapter about the history of prison journalism. As a result, the present work represents the first attempt to tell the complete story.

Second, writing this book required combining institutional history and biography because I sought both to trace the history of the publications and to paint a portrait of people responsible for them. As much as possible I have also tried to let the reader hear the inmates tell the story in their own words. The biographical aspects were certainly the most compelling and important. For that reason they dominate the book when my research was able to reach beyond the publications to the inmate-journalists themselves. Obviously, in the course of this kind of research, one develops some affinities toward particular characters whose lives one probes. It will be clear to the reader that I was touched by Tom Runyon, fascinated with Charles Chapin, and struck with admiration for Wilbert Rideau.

Third, as hard as I have tried to include the role of minorities and women, the story has remained overwhelmingly one about white male inmates. The racism and sexism that so pervades our society has been equally or perhaps even more prevalent in our penal institutions. It was not, for instance, until 1975, when Rideau took the helm of the *Angolite*, that any black prisoner held a position of authority on a prison newspaper. On the other hand, the lack of women prison journalists is more understandable, as women's incarceration rate has been minuscule in comparison to men's. It was not until the 1970s that women exceeded 3 percent of the overall prison population.

For all these reasons, it has been frustrating to seek information about minority and female prison journalists. Frequently, I would find tantalizing hints about publications that would have made this book more complete had they survived. There were, for example, several publications produced in segregated prisons, such as the Industrial Home for Negro Girls in Missouri and the Virginia Industrial School for Colored Girls, but apparently there are no copies extant.

Fourth, it has been an effort to provide a sufficient context for readers who are not familiar with the history of newspapers, the media in general, and American penal history so that the story of these remarkable publications may be properly understood. It will be difficult for some readers to understand how important a newspaper was to an inmate, especially a newspaper produced within the prison. In great part, that is because newspapers have lost their primacy in our lives today. But during most of the years covered by this history, they were *the media*.

Fifth and finally, writing portions of this work has been like trying to hit a moving target. The events that have transpired during the sixteen years that I have nosed around in this field have moved the subject of this book from the current events shelf to that of history. With the exception of a few penitentiaries, prison journalism is becoming a curiosity of the past.

Thanks are due to many people who have helped me in the course of my research. I extend my gratitude first to Ron Hoelzer, an inmate of the Missouri prison system, who introduced me to this subject in 1979, and Robert Priddy, a premier journalist and historian, who encouraged me to pursue this book. I have dedicated this work to them.

The National Press Foundation provided me with a grant at a moment when I thought no one cared about this subject. *The Progressive* and *The Pacific News Service* paid for a trip to California; *Corrections Magazine* generously supported another part of my travels. My agent, Bill Adler, was true to his word and found a caring publisher.

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James McGrath Morris
Falls Church, Virginia
Fall 1997

Introduction

Putting Down Doing Time

After all, if the prisoner is not championed by his own people, just who the hell can he expect to do anything for him? And how else, except through the prison paper, is his side to be brought forward?

—*San Quentin News*, circa 1942

In 1980, at the end one of those sweltering summer days in Jefferson City, Missouri, when everyone who could fled the state capital for the coolness of the Lake of the Ozarks, a reporter opened a bottle of grape soda on the sharp edge of an old metal desk in a colleague's office. He had walked the five long blocks from the broadcast studio where he worked and now sat as still as he could, trying to limit the torrents of sweat that came with slightest exertion. Over the course of the past several months, he had made it a regular practice on his way home to stop in on Ron Hoelzer's cramped office, furnished mostly with surplus state government furniture. Now the reporter was moving away, and this was likely to be his last visit. The heat and the sadness of parting restricted the two reporters to quiet shop talk. But as they gabbed, it struck the reporter that listening to Hoelzer talk, one would never guess that he earned his pay working with words. As with almost everything else in his community, however, first appearances were deceiving. Words were indeed important to Hoelzer. They had become even more so since he became editor of the *Jefftown Journal*, a small news magazine with a readership of just over two thousand. A captive readership, one might say—because most of them, along with Hoelzer, were inmates of the 150-year-old state penitentiary overlooking the Missouri River.

Hoelzer's magazine was just one of some 100 periodicals that were published by and for the inmates of America's prisons in the 1980s. Unlike their peers who passed their sentences stamping out license plates, these convicts spent their days like reporters in any community—looking for the

story. Yet their own story, the lengthy history of their unique brand of journalism, remained largely unknown.

Hoelzer was an unsophisticated practitioner of his trade. His little magazine appeared sporadically, dependent on discretionary funds from the warden's office. Other prison journals, over the years, were finely produced publications that appeared regularly and if placed on a newsstand would have been hard to distinguish from "free world" newspapers and magazines.

Like their packaging, prison publications have varied in quality and approach to news. Hoelzer's *Jefftown Journal*, for instance, was always searching for the silver lining inside the walls that confined its readers. Prison news was reported in the best possible light, and inmates were encouraged to work toward their rehabilitation. "We want to show society more than anything, that there's more happening in prison than the violence they constantly hear about," explained Lou Miller, an assistant editor.¹

Many prison newspapers have taken the same approach over the years, and thus their pages are replete with news written in a kind of booster style. But some - the exceptional ones - were uncompromising and rabble-rousing. "The best of prison journals," wrote James Fixx in 1963, "are among the liveliest, wittiest, and energetically Menckenesque publications that ever fractured a stereotype."²

Prison journalism is not new. A prison journalism hall of fame would encompass two centuries and would include men such as Robert Morris, the "financier of the American Revolution"; the Younger Brothers of the Jesse James Gang; Julian Hawthorne, the only son of Nathaniel Hawthorne; men of the radical Industrial Workers of the World (IWW); Charles Chapin, famed city editor of New York's *Evening World* until he shot his wife; Dr. Frederick Cook, North Pole explorer, whose claim to have been the first to reach the pole is still debated today; Tom Runyon, who introduced himself to the public with a machine gun but won a place for himself in history with an Underwood; and Wilbert Rideau, an illiterate teenaged murderer who raised prison journalism to a pinnacle of achievement.

Prison journalism has had many incarnations over its history. It began as part of a lonely debtor's effort to win his release from prison in 1800. In the late nineteenth century it became an instrument of the prison reform movement. From the early part of the twentieth century until about the 1950s, it grew into an important cultural institution of prison life. In the 1970s and 1980s, with the advent of the prisoners' rights movement, it took

on a new aggressiveness. Since the late 1980s and 1990s, however, it has apparently been suffering a slow death.

The world of a prison journalist has been, in all respects, the antithesis of that in which “free” reporters work. Although prisons are ostensibly constructed to rehabilitate men and women to live in a free society, they are closed, autocratic worlds, each one as different from the others as the state governments or officials who run them. Nonetheless, most prisons are old, crowded, violent places. Prison overcrowding has become even more acute since state legislators cranked up their war on drugs in the 1980s and 1990s, imposing stiffer penalties while doing little to improve the prisons to which these new convicts were sent.

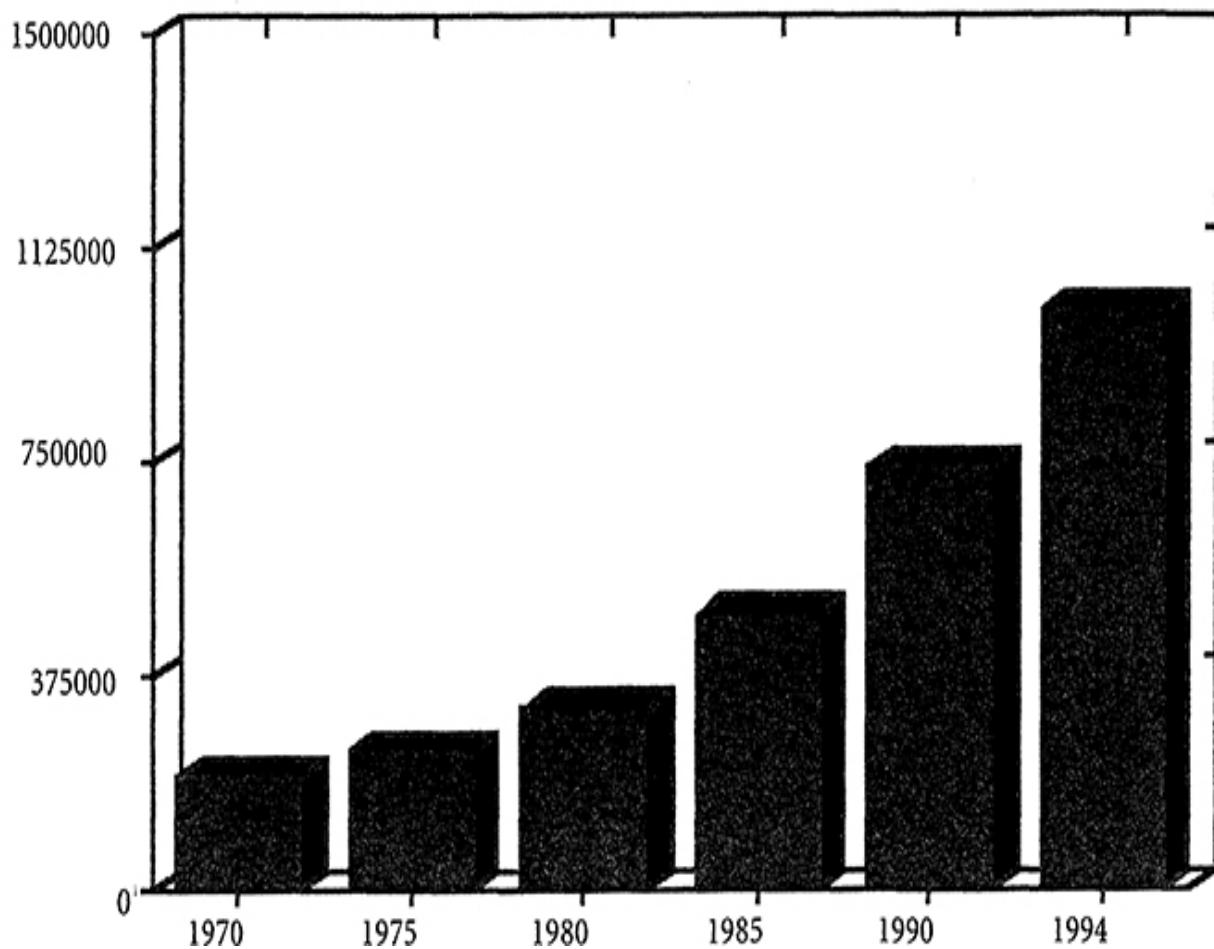


Figure 1.1 Growth of prison population in the U.S., 1970-1995.

America’s prison populations have been growing at such a rate that prison authorities may soon be forced to post “No Vacancy” signs outside their

gates. Between 1970 and 1995, the number of inmates in state and federal prisons more than quintupled, according to the 1995 edition of the *Statistical Abstract of the United States* (see Figure 1.1).³ The increase in the inmate population has so outstripped the nation's population growth that the incarceration rate has leaped from less than 100 per 100,000 persons in 1975 to 353 per 100,000 persons in 1993.

The predominant portion of the growth has come in state prisons. As of 1993, only 74,399 of the 910,080 inmates in the nation were held in federal prisons. This actually represents a decrease as a percentage of the nation's inmate population.⁴ In state prisons, where nine often criminals are housed, inmates are likely to be males between the ages of 25 and 34. This is unchanged from twenty years ago. What is dramatically different is the offenses for which the inmates are serving time. Drug offenders now make up 30.5 percent of the prison population, a fivefold increase from 1980, according to criminologist Robert Johnson.⁵ Also, the statistics on incarceration show that blacks are imprisoned at a rate far greater than whites. The 1992 incarceration rate for black males was 2,678 per 100,000 persons, seven times the rate for whites (372 per 100,000).⁶ If age is also considered, the incarceration rates reveal that black males between 20 and 35 are being imprisoned at a prodigious rate of 4,775 per 100,000 persons.⁷ As a result, black males now comprise an absolute majority of the prison population, though blacks make up less than 13 percent of the nation's population.

Literacy Level					
Percentage of:	1	2	3	4	5
Prison population	31	37	26	6	0
Household population	21	27	32	17	3

Table 1.1 A large percentage of the inmate population possesses a lower literacy rate than the general population. Each level represents a correspondingly higher level of literacy.

The educational attainment of inmates is, as one might expect, lower than that of the general population. This is true also of their literacy, a characteristic particularly relevant to the subject of prison journalism. A person incarcerated is more likely to have reading skills that are, at best, elementary, according to a national survey. The survey examined the ability of inmates to read prose text, among other items. It found that on average, prisoners were able to read simple newspaper articles but had difficulty when the article increased in density and length (see Table 1.1).⁸

Whether one considers prison a tool of retribution or of rehabilitation, most people believe it has failed to achieve either purpose. Instead, the institution has unintentionally spawned a subculture that is antithetical to both goals - and it has become clear that the beliefs and behavior of inmates are far more likely to be shaped by this subculture than by the prison and its programs.

While it is true that huge disparities exist between facilities because the confinement of criminals is handled mostly by states rather than the federal government, similarities in the dominant culture - what sociologists might call *cultural universals*— still prevail in prisons across the nation. The most common element shaping the culture of prison today is overcrowding. Instead of concerning themselves with the original purpose of the institution, prison officials are forced to focus almost exclusively on simply keeping control over their wards. It has produced a de facto surrender of all spheres of prison life, not just those that deal directly with security. In other words, after creating artificial, single-sex societies characterized primarily by a removal of basic freedoms, penologists have left their dysfunctional wards to conduct their own affairs. Prisons have become like managed versions of *Lord of the Flies*.

This capitulation has been long in coming. As early as 1965, it was observed by M. Arc, an anthropologist who was convicted in a security matter. “My scientific colleagues would call me a “participant-observer,” he wrote in an account of his prison time. “The United States Bureau of Prisons called me an inmate. I served in both capacities, of course, on an involuntary field trip among an isolated tribe of fellow human beings.”⁹

What Arc discovered was a duality of behavior that exists in prisons to this day. “The climate,” Arc wrote, “spawns two characteristics of prison culture that often confuse an outsider: the appearance of conformity within the official system, and an underground pattern of nonconformity by which

the individual inmate tries to live by his own code, preserving as best he can his personal preferences and habits.”¹⁰

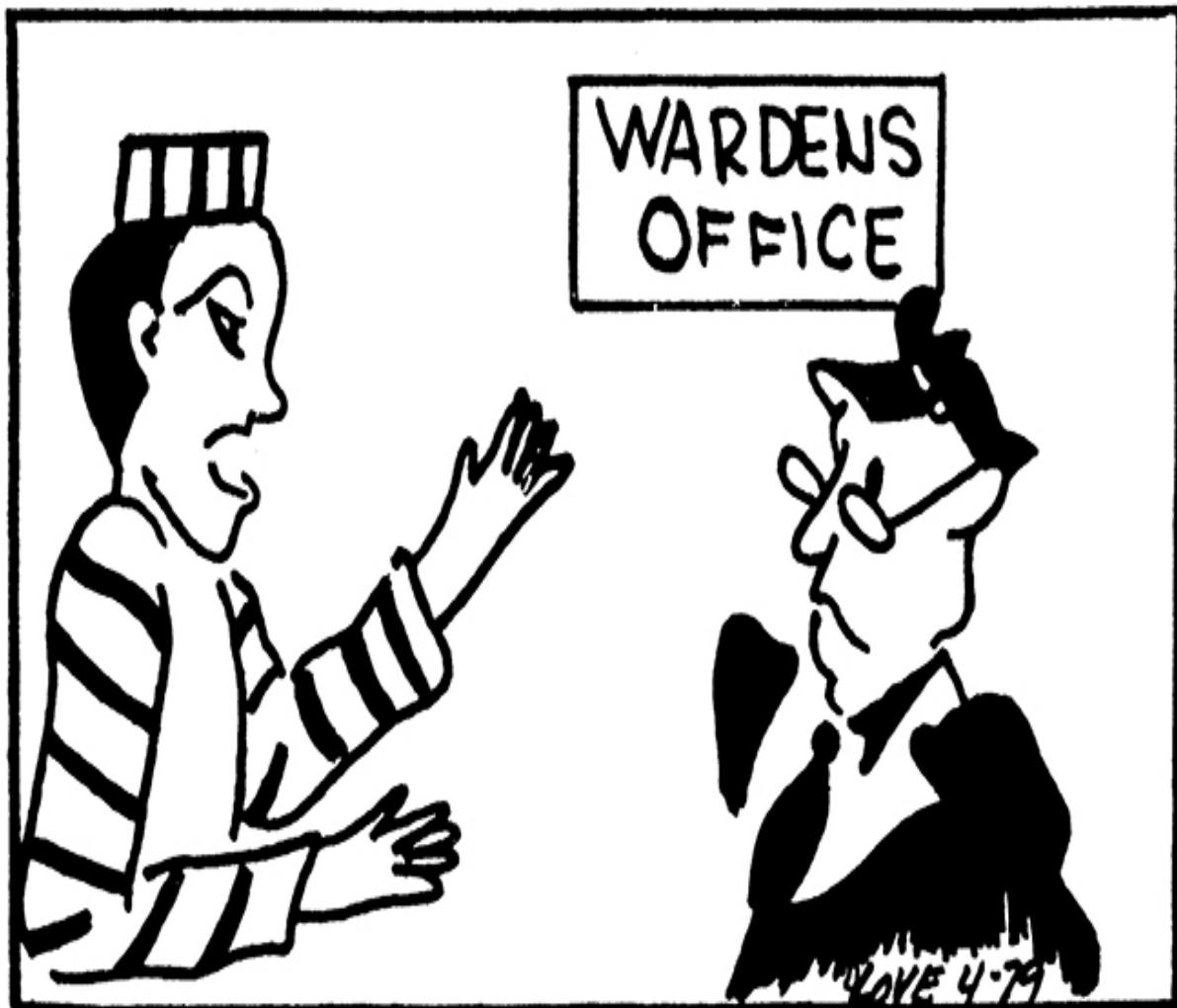
The most significant change since 1965, when Arc took his “field trip,” and 1997 has been the explosive growth in violence that has accompanied the tremendous growth in prison populations. This has become the single most powerful factor in shaping the culture of prison. “Prison is a place of many frightening experiences,” wrote Wilbert Rideau and Billy Sinclair, two editors of *Angolite*, the prison newsmagazine of the Louisiana State Prison, which in the 1980s became the most famous prison publication ever. “To the younger prisoner it’s that horror-stricken feeling that rips into his gut the moment another man tells him to up his ass. To the older, hardened convict, it’s being stomped and beaten into utter submission by the goon-squad in some dirty isolation building.”¹¹

The violence of prison life is manifested in many ways. One of them, as Rideau and Sinclair suggested, is through sex. Another manifestation, subtle but more consequential, is through the destruction of all norms of behavior necessary for life outside of prison. A successful convict is the one who survives and adapts to prison culture. Unfortunately, the skills he learns doom him to failure when he is released. “And why shouldn’t he be back?” asked Arc. “Prison offered only a system of punitive rules, a staff composed mostly of indifferent guards and values formed by fear, anger and frustration.”¹² The manner by which society chooses to handle the confinement of its criminals engenders a counterculture that thwarts the purpose of the criminal justice system.

Most prison journalists who, like Rideau of the *Angolite*, have been chronicling this violent world have no formal training. There have been some, of course, who were journalists whose careers on the outside were interrupted by a criminal offense. Most inmate-journalists, however, learned their first lessons about the vocation by feeding words to a hungry printing press rolling off copies of their prison newspaper. In this environment, their lack of training has not been a handicap, as the society on which they report abides by none of the rules governing the world beyond the walls.

“It is doubtful if man ever forgets the strange sensation he experienced when, for the first time in his life, he found himself in a prison cell and heard the rattle and clatter of bolts and bars that cut him off from the outer world,” wrote a New York inmate-journalist in the spring of 1915. “He gazes at the bars and walls and realizes that he has passed from his own control to the

control of others: That from being a freeman he has, in a sense, become a slave.”¹³ In this world without freedom, an inmate-journalist functions with burdensome restrictions. He must regularly report on the actions of officials who will have a large say on whether he will ever be released. A prison journalist who is unwilling to go along with the censor’s capricious blue pencil may find the description “uncooperative, disrespectful of authority” in his parole application file. No inmate wants to spend an extra day behind bars, but for some, pursuing a story may mean just that.



**“WHY WOULD I TRY TO ESCAPE? I PAID A
LAWYER TO GET IN!”**

Humor has been a regular feature of most prison newspapers. This cartoon appeared in the January 1980 edition of the *Jefftown Journal*, formerly published at the Missouri state prison.

Further, no prison official will tolerate, at least for very long, a prison newspaper that threatens his rule. For example, Vic Diaz, editor in the early 1980s of the *Vacaville Star* at the California Medical Facility in Vacaville, said it's obvious he cannot report about corruption in his "hometown administration" the way a reporter on the outside could. "If I was to do a story like that, I could never get it into print because the people who I am writing about are the ones who are going to make that decision," he said. "They are not going to allow me to tell how dirty their backyard is."¹⁴

The prizewinning *Angolite* has been able to criticize prison authorities to an extent that no other prison publication has thus far been allowed. But it is apparently the sole exception to the censorship rule, and its extraordinary fame has won it a measure of protection. As the editor of Massachusetts state prison's *Mentor*, noted in 1950, "A penal magazine perforce has its limitations. In the true sense of the word absolute freedom is not only an impossibility, it is a dangerous illusion."¹⁵

Most who dare try to extend the limits of a prison publication's freedom find that, like Vic Diaz, they face new frustrations. There may be delays in getting copy approved, or unexplained shortages of supplies. Prison officials are particularly sensitive about having their actions reviewed by anyone, especially their wards. Prison is "basically a lawless society," said Michael Snedeker, a California attorney who has defended inmate-journalists, "in that they are used to being able to do whatever they feel is right and not be bound by guidelines or standards that are subject to any independent review." For most prison officials, he said, "due process is a concept similar to Maoism."

The court in Diaz's case regularly backed him. But for every court order there was another way to prevent an inmate newspaper from seeing the light of day. Once, for example, Diaz was told to remove three "inflammatory" articles and a letter from an upcoming issue. Instead of replacing the articles, Diaz left blank spaces where they were to appear and splashed the word "censored" across the white holes. The superintendent refused to allow the paper to be distributed and had the entire run of the issue carted off and burned. Of course, by the time the courts responded, months had elapsed. This is a typical problem for inmate-journalists, who cannot afford to spend all their time and resources in court if they are to publish a newspaper with any regularity.

"I have never understood the thing about administrators being afraid of the prison publication," said Wrlbert Rideau of the *Angolite*. "They are the

ones who choose who run it.” But officials are wary, especially of removing an editor once he is appointed. Such a move can have repercussions both among the inmates and in court. Thus officials often try to appoint an editor who they believe will be harmless. Sometimes, to their chagrin, they discover that once on the job he becomes an aggressive journalist.

The *Manual of Correctional Standards* issued by the American Correctional Association in 1966 suggested that “when officials and inmates appreciate each other’s position … there is little need for strict censorship.” More often than not, this prediction came true because the administration sent a clear message to the inmate-editor. “The realistic situation we need to face,” said Benjamin Lach, editor of the *Echo* of the Texas state prison in 1980, “is that the administration here has no regard for the inmates, be they editors or non-editors.” The only thing he dared to print in the 1980s concerning the administration of the overcrowded and dangerous Texas prison was what came from the front office. Inmates, he explained, “are viewed as the trash of society, and the only way I have to change that is to continue doing what I am doing every day — namely being a model prisoner.”¹⁶

Intimidation at the Illinois prison at Menard stripped the *Menard Time*, one of the old war-horses of the trade, of news about what really went on in the prison. News concerning prison violence, overcrowding, or anything that took issue with prison policy was not published in the *Time*, according to Robert Russo, who served as editor in the early 1980s. “There are a multitude of people within this institution and other institutions that would say the newspaper is simply a pawn because it is not doing the things I have said it couldn’t do,” admitted Russo. Officials decided the paper was not an organ of the inmate body, but a vocational tool. “The bottom line,” said Russo, “is they are here to teach you to write, to run various presses and machines. Now, whether that newspaper actually gets circulated is not part of the vocational training.”¹⁷



Prison artists have found a receptive home for their work in the pages of prison publications. This illustration appeared on the back cover of the January/February 1996 *Angolite*, published in the Louisiana State Penitentiary.

Prison authorities have never determined just whom the penal press is intended to serve. In the fall of 1995, for instance, the Michigan Department of Corrections pondered issuing new rules governing that state's prison newspapers. "Prison newspapers were not designed to be the same as those on the outside," said Warren Williams, chief spokesman for the department. "They were designed to be informational, to include stories about various programs, rule changes, or anything that might impact a prisoner." Under the proposed new rules, editorials, letters of opinion, and even modest complaints about the food would no longer be permitted. "One of the problems is that things that were originally considered privileges have evolved, in the prisoner's minds at least, into rights," he said of the state's previous policy of permitting "legitimate viewpoints" in the newspapers.¹⁸

But officials, and prison censors, have always made life difficult for prison journalists. "It is not only extremely difficult to please three thousand men, but also to please "the censors of prison publications," complained an editor of the Atlanta Federal Penitentiary's *Good Words* in 1936. "Just about the time you feel you have written, or someone else had written, a timely article, along comes the censor and says 'Hold up, that won't do for this publication.'"¹⁹ When censorship was not sufficient to silence offending voices, officials took to closing the publications. In 1922, for instance, authorities in New York suppressed the *Sing Sing Bulletin* after the editor angered officials one time too many. His final offense, it seems, was publishing the memoirs of a bigamist.

Inmate-editors, over the years, have tried to watch out for each other. In 1940, for example, editors at the *Atlantian*, the news magazine of the Atlanta prison, were concerned about the disappearance of an editor from the masthead of the prison publication in Oregon. On a page devoted to news of other prison publications the editors inserted, "Just where is Hugh? Please Warden Alexander."

Over time, the tactics of prison officials have remained much the same, though they have grown more sophisticated. In California, Vic Diaz worried about "what we call the old midnight express, where they come and get you after the rest of the institution is locked down, put you in a car and ship you off to another joint." Other prison editors feared that their publications

would be shut down and fighting the closings in court would be difficult because officials would cite budgetary constraints instead of the real reasons. “The unwritten rules are the ones you have to worry about,” said Donnie Johnson of the *San Quentin News*.

For inmate-journalists who did cope successfully with the hurdles placed in their way by officials, still another, perhaps more dangerous, problem remained: the inmates. Not surprisingly, inmates are often sensitive about having a reporter, especially one of their own, prowling about and writing things they would prefer remain out of print. You do not, said *Angolite*’s Rideau (providing an extreme example), print the details of who raped whom as an outside newspaper might. If you did, a reader whose name was mentioned would probably do more than write an angry letter to the editor.

Rideau called this “censorship of survival.” It has confronted all inmate editors. For *Vacavalle Star* editor Diaz it meant watching for the inmate population’s reaction as well as the administration’s. And, when he looked over his shoulder, he had to consider “all they could do to me all the way up to taking me out, setting me up to be killed, or whatever,” he said. “That may sound exaggerated, but in prison that’s the reality.”²⁰

As Morris “Red” Rudensky, editor of the *Atlantian* in the early 1940s, wrote, “Being a prison editor is no sinecure.” An editor must continually choose whether to be the inmates’ advocate, an independent chronicler, or the administration’s mouthpiece. Whichever path an editor takes, he is bound to find it lonely. “He is often roundly scored and cussed,” complained an editor of Leavenworth’s *New Era* in 1915. “He is credited with sycophancy, truculence and every contemptible trait because he does not attack certain things which the prisoner body condemns.”²¹ Six years later, another *New Era* editor said that no matter what he decided to publish he would be called “a cat by one class [of inmates] and a fool by another.”²²

Rudensky, for instance, who was a gangster before becoming a prison journalist, often found himself accused of being a turncoat. He was regularly regarded, he wrote, “as a sort of stooge for the administration who interprets the so-called gripes of his fellow prisoners with rose-colored views and mealy-mouthed phrases, to the detriment of his fellow men and with a greedy eye peeled for his nest feathering.”²³

Tom Runyon, editor for many years of Iowa’s *Presidio* and probably one of the most popular inmate-journalists in the history of the trade, put it another way. “Being a prison editor,” he wrote in his memoir, “means

walking a tightrope between officials and convicts, unable to tell the whole truth about either.”²⁴ If he gave officials any credit he would be attacked by his fellow inmates; on the other hand, he could not “scream too loud about bad prison conditions without being listed as an agitator.”

Considering the hurdles, dangers, criticisms, and other hazards of the job, why did inmate-journalists bother? In each case the motives were different, but for most certain reasons prevailed.

First, inmates found that producing their own newspaper or magazine could be a source of power. Rideau, for example, believed his *Angolite* was the “singular most influential inmate force” within the Louisiana prison. Articles in his magazine prompted reforms, were used as the basis of lawsuits, and even, in one case, helped obtain the release of an inmate whose case had been overlooked by the Department of Corrections.

Second, and equally important, inmate-journalists hope that their work would help publicize their side of the story. “The prison press,” wrote an editor of *New Era* in 1918, “is the only agency so far established by which the prison body can cross the gulf fixed by juridical mandate and maintained by social ostracism.”²⁵ Although inmates today may more easily submit material for publication in outside periodicals, not much of it is published because it holds little interest for most outside readers and editors. “The wall is thicker than it looks,” observed an editor of the *Jefftown Journal*.²⁶ Prison newspapers and magazines have been a way for some inmates to breach that wall. Many of the publications have enjoyed wide circulation outside their prisons. The *Angolite*, for example, has many outside subscribers including libraries, judges, journalists, and elected officials. The most avid readers, nonetheless, remained other inmate-journalists.

Third, inmate-journalists appreciated the recognition given to their work. Sometimes this was the most important benefit. “Before I came to the *Angolite* I was a criminal nobody,” said Rideau. “Now I am at least someone that is recognizable, who has credibility.”²⁷ His publication won the Robert F. Kennedy Award for Outstanding Coverage of the Problems of the Disadvantaged in 1979, the George Polk Award in 1980, and the Sidney Hillman Award in 1981. In 1992, Random House published a collection of works from the *Angolite*. In 1993, Rideau was even portrayed in a stage drama.

The same motivation was present for Robert Morgan, an editor of the *Prison Mirror*, published at the maximum-security prison at Stillwater,

Minnesota, when it celebrated its centennial in 1987. Sentenced to life for a 1985 murder, Morgan said the *Mirror* gives meaning to his life in prison.

“They can bury us here if they want to.... As a matter of fact, if you look at Minnesota’s computerized evaluations of our time, it says ‘Expiration date: death.’ So, for us, this is more than a job.”²⁸

Fourth, inmate editors who became involved in the lives of their comrades found that prison journalism offered an avenue for their efforts. “It brings him [the editor] in closer touch with men he wants to know and help,” said a *New Era* writer in 1921.²⁹ Sixty-five years later, Woody Eargle understood what the anonymous *New Era* writer meant when he was editing the *Interim*, the monthly newspaper at the Tennessee State Prison. “There are so many people in prison with so many ideas about how to change things, but they have no medium to express these things,” he said.³⁰ The same sentiment held true for Barry Lock, a former Massachusetts prison journalist. “With every issue, there is somewhere a positive impact on some inmate because it’s a product put together by his fellow convicts for him.”³¹



Santa Fe Prison News

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The mostly male world of inmate publications has frequently included dreamlike portrayals of what the prisoners left behind, as in the cover of this issue of *Santa Fe Prison News* of February 1984.

Fifth, and finally, one cannot overlook the therapeutic side of prison journalism. “How can you express yourself in prison?” Ed Rolin, a creative arts coordinator in a Pennsylvania prison, once asked. “Violently or on paper. It’s a lot more therapeutic on paper.”³²

The *Jefftown Journal*’s Hoelzer is an example of one man who came down on the preferable side of Rolin’s expressive dichotomy. Hoelzer was sent to the Missouri State Penitentiary in 1969 after completing a series of robberies during which he murdered four people. Thirty at the time, he had been in and out of prison since he was picked up in a stolen car at the age of sixteen. He now faced a life in prison and saw little reason to adapt to his new future. Within six months he killed an inmate and wounded another. After that incident, he recalled, prison authorities wanted to leave him in detention and throw away the key. “That’s just what this place thought of me at the time,” he said. “And, this is what I was indicating: That I was too rebellious, too dangerous to ever amount to anything or be good for anything.”

Following thirty-four months in solitary confinement he was released back into the prison’s general population and assigned to work as an assistant to the prison paper’s editor. Why he got the job he still doesn’t know, but he thought it would be an easy one. In time, however, he came to admire the older editor and began to work hard. As Wilbert Rideau and countless other inmates have done over the years, Hoelzer also discovered the elation that comes from writing. Soon, his days were spent sitting behind his desk in a small office near the officer’s mess room, filling legal notepads with stories, articles, and columns, many of which appeared later in the *Jefftown Journal*. His writing was somewhat awkward and required patience from the reader, but it gave his life behind bars some meaning and a measure of peace. “This is the only job that I can remember ever doing, in or out of prison, that I felt was me,” he confessed one day.³³

By 1996, Hoelzer had earned a transfer to a less secure institution. The *Jefftown Journal*, however, was closed in the 1980s like many other prison publications. For Hoelzer, the diminutive magazine had been a vehicle to break down the stereotypes of convicts held by the outside world. He believed it was a kind of bridge between inmates and the world beyond the walls, as well as between inmates and the administration. Often, in his

writing, Hoelzer could be seen trying to reach the outsider. “How do you make someone see that which they refuse to look at?” he asked in one of his columns. “The cries of those who have been subjected to the cruel rigors of long years in prison fall upon deaf ears.”³⁴

The idea that a prison publication could reach outsiders and perhaps change the image of convicts was always an enduring notion among prison journalists. “There are a lot of misnomers and myths about prison,” said Leon Washington, editor of the *Menard Time* at Illinois’ Menard Correctional Center in 1986. “We try to play up the entire scope of things that are going on here.... Most people are not going to read much about what’s going on in prisons. We try to fill in the gaps wherever we can.”³⁵

Galen Moon, an assistant editor of the *Atlantian* in the 1950s, contended that prison journalism, because it is a rigorous discipline requiring free speech and documentation, could change public opinion. “Application of these principles by inmate publications,” he wrote, “might pose a threat to some of the illusions so carefully nurtured by advocates of the once a criminal, always a criminal’ theory.”³⁶

For many prison journalists, though, writing and publishing a paper was like much of prison life, a game of getting along. “They’re con men—they’ll do it with poetry as easily as with bad checks,” said one organizer of prison writing workshops. But for most inmates, prison journalism offers a chance to escape their confinement and its effects.

“Prison is a place where everything is an assault upon your self-worth, self-esteem,” said Rideau. The daily routine will kill any need to make decisions. “You can become like an old knife that has grown rusty.” Writing and publishing his magazine offers a way out from that routine. “You have to be thinking all the time to resolve and define situations before they come up.”³⁷

Supreme Court Justice Thurgood Marshall once observed, “When the prison gates slam behind an inmate he does not lose his human quality; his mind does not become closed to ideas; his intellect does not cease to feed on a free and open interchange of opinions.” An inmate’s quest for self-respect does not end with his entry into prison. “Whether an O. Henry writing his short stories in a jail cell or a frightened young inmate writing his family, a prisoner needs a medium for self-expression,” he wrote.³⁸

Prison periodicals, in many instances, have provided that medium. They have afforded an opportunity for men (and less often, for women) deprived

of all the rights most people take for granted to voice their ideas, thoughts, and version of the truth without interpreters. Truth is always a precious and elusive thing, but more so in prison. There, one person's truth is, more often than not, another's lie. There is no middle ground. Inmates and officials come to live their lies. The guilty inmate who at first proclaimed his innocence as a defense comes to believe it. Officials who view all their wards as guilty fail to see the innocent.

Writers like myself parade through these hidden-away communities of misfortune. Usually we are escorted; sometimes we are left to ourselves. Nonetheless we think we have some idea of what goes on inside the rows of cell blocks we pass. But we go home. Maybe only after a few hours, sometimes after days. But we do leave, and we do so at the time of our choosing. Sammy Reese, a cartoonist for *The Jefftown Journal* in the early 1960s, illustrated the difference. In his cartoon an inmate says to the guard, "Let's get one thing straight ... I live here, you just work here."³⁹

Chapter 1

Forlorn Hope

The Indian tribes, whom we affect to call savages, smile with contempt on our customs when they see our fellows shut up in cages like monsters or wild beasts.

—Forlorn Hope, June 7, 1800

Prison journalism was born in the squalor of an eighteenth-century debtors' prison. The setting was hardly conducive to the birth. Just to find a meal each day was a consuming struggle for most prisoners because the authorities made little or no provision for the support of inmates. Light was usually nonexistent, and diseases swept through the incarcerated population like drafts in an old building. Yet, even under these conditions, in the spring of 1800, an inmate of the New York City debtors' prison published America's first-known prison newspaper.

Twentieth-century Americans, afloat in a sea of credit, would find it difficult to understand the harsh treatment that was reserved for debtors two centuries ago. Most state laws required that debtors who could not pay their creditors be confined to jail and find their own means of support until such time as they settled their debt. In New York, a debtor's lot was harsh. "No provisions whatever is made by law to furnish him a penny for subsistence, not a particle of meat, drink or clothing, and no better lodging than the naked floor of his cell," wrote a contemporary observer.¹ New York also restricted the movement of its imprisoned debtors so that they could not even purchase food or supplies from merchants near the jail. Debtors held in a New York jail depended almost entirely on friends, family, and charity. "No people in eighteenth century society," wrote historian Merrill Jensen, "were more luckless than those imprisoned for debt, and they were an astonishingly large part of the jail population."²

In 1790, a visitor to the New York debtors' prison, located just east of city hall, wrote to a friend, "The wretchedness there is past my power to attempt a description-If distress ever claimed legislative assistance, the melancholy situation of the confined debtors in this place demand attention."³ Appeals to improve conditions were ignored even if they came from prison authorities. In the late 1790s, for instance, the city's ruling body rejected a request from the prison keeper "that provisions be made for the lighting, white-washing, and cleaning the jail."⁴

Unlike criminals, who were jailed because they willfully acted in a wrong manner, most borrowers were in jail not because they refused to pay, but because they were impoverished. "That is what made the work of the Society for the Relief of Distressed Debtors so important," wrote historian Peter J. Coleman. "It collected large amounts of beef, bread, and money (including fifty pounds from President Washington), and in 1802 it opened a soup kitchen near the city jail to supply prisoners and other poor people with hot food."⁵

It was into this world that William Keteltas was thrown. An articulate, well-educated, and clever attorney with a practice on Broadway, Keteltas was nonetheless unable to avoid jail when he fell into financial trouble. The extent of his troubles is no longer known. In the early 1800s, many imprisoned debtors owed less than twenty-five dollars, often as little as ten. Considering that Keteltas had been an attorney, it seems likely he could have found the means to repay a small debt, leading one to surmise that his financial problem was considerable.

Once he became a resident of New York's debtors' jail, he immediately began to work for his release. His approach was novel: he would campaign to eliminate the very crime for which he was imprisoned. "Finding it impossible to do this by petition, as forcibly as through the medium of a paper," he wrote, "I have determined to attempt the establishment of one for this expressed purpose."⁶ Thus on Monday morning, March 24, 1800, *Forlorn Hope* was published, carrying an open letter to the public.

Restrained in this enjoyment [of liberty] with many, too many of my fellow citizens in the different prisons in this state, and finding myself at the mercy of an individual, I fly to the constitution - the ark of safety. I ask the representatives of the people, to whom is intrusted the application of its preserving powers, to apply the remedy by a law for our deliverance. To point out the necessity of legislative interference, I need only to relate the devastation of property and the destruction of lives lost by the operation of a law intended to have a contrary effect.⁷

The first issue of his paper was similar in appearance to the dozens of weekly newspapers circulating in and around New York at the time. Its front page, three columns wide, was also quite like that of papers of that era. It was usually devoted to reprinting speeches, such as George Washington's Farewell Address; essays, such as one titled "Original Thoughts on Female Education"; or lengthy historical accounts, such as of the trial of King Charles I.⁸

Dominating the top of the front page was a large seal. It featured a black man in tattered rags on one knee, exhibiting his chains. Standing to his side was a bearded white man also in chains but clothed. Below the pair were printed the words "Liberty suspended but will be restored." Above them, in another banner, were the words "We would starve were it not for the Humane Society," referring to what had been formerly known as the Society for the Relief of Distressed Debtors. The masthead symbolized the simultaneous campaigns to free the debtors and the slaves that Keteltas and his nascent paper championed.

FORLORN HOPE.



WASHINGTON'S EXAMPLE WILL BREAK THE CHAIN.

SOFT SMILING HOPE THOU ANCHOR OF THE MIND,
AND ONLY COMFORT SINCE THE DRETTED DIED.—I ALL LOOK TO THEE WHEN SORROW PIERCETH THE HEART.

VOL. I.]

PRISON, NEW-YORK : SATURDAY, APRIL 19, M.DCC.

[NUM. 4

WASHINGTON'S ADDRESS TO THE PEOPLE of the UNITED STATES. [CONCLUDED.]

OBSERVE good faith and justice towards all Nations : Cultivate peace and harmony with all. Religion and Morality enjoin this conduct : and can it be that good policy does not equally enjoin it ? It will be worth of a free, enlightened, and at no distant period, a great nation, to give to mankind the magnanimous and too novel example of a people always guided by an exalted justice and benevolence. Who can doubt, that in the course of time and things the fruits of such a plan would richly repay any temporary advantages which might be lost by a steady adherence to it ?—Can it be that Providence has not connected the permanent felicity of a nation with its virtue ? The experiment, at least is recommended by every sentiment which endures human nature. Alas ! is it rendered impossible by its vices ?

In the execution of such a plan, nothing is more efficacious than that personal, inveterate sympathies against particular nations, and passionate attachments for others should be excluded ; and that in place of them just and amiable feelings towards all should be cultivated. The nation which indulges towards another an habitual hatred, or an habitual fondness, is in some degree a slave. It is a slave to its antipathy or to its affections, either of which is sufficient to lead it always from its duty and its interest. Antipathy in one nation against another, disposes each more readily to offer insults and injury, to lay hold of slight causes of umbrage, and to be ungracious and unfeeling, when accidental or trifling occasions of dispute occur. Hence frequent collisions, collisions, evasions and bloody contests. The union prompted by ill will or refinement, sometimes impels to war the government, contrary to the best calculations of policy. The government sometimes participates in the national propensity, and adopts, through passion, what reason would reject ; at other times, it makes the animosity of the nation subservient to projects of hostility, infligated by pride, ambition, and other unfeeling and pernicious motives. The peace, often, sometimes, perhaps the liberty, of nations has been the victim.

So likewise, a passionate attachment of one nation for another produces a variety of evils. Sympathy for the favorite nation, facilitating the illusion of an imaginary common interest, in cases

where no real common interest exists, and inducing nations to sacrifice the interests of the other, betrays the former into participation in the quarrels & wars of the latter, without adequate inducement or justification. It leads also to contumacious, the favoritism, of particularized and to others, which is aptly doubly to injure the nation making the concessions ; by unnecessarily parting with what ought to have been retained ; and by exacting jealousy, ill will, and a disposition to realize, in the parties from whom equal privileges are withheld : And it gives to ambitious, corrupted or deluded caudillos who devote themselves to the favorite nation, facility to betray or sacrifice the interests of their own country, without shame, sometimes even with popularity ; gilding with the appearance of a virtuous laud of obligation a commendable defense for public opinion, or a laudable zeal for public good, the base or foulish compliances of ambition, corruption or infatuation.

An avenue to foreign influence in innumerable ways, such attachments are particularly alienating to the truly enlightened and independent mind. How many opportunities do they afford to tamper with domestic factions, to profligate the arts of seduction, to offend public opinion, to influence or awe the public councils ? Such an attachment of a small or weak, towards a great and powerful nation, disposes the former to be the slave of the latter.

Against the injurious wiles of foreign influence, (I conjure you to believe me, fellow citizens,) the jealousy of a free people might be insomuch awake ; but history and experience prove that foreign influence is one of the most baneful foes of republican governments. But that jealousy to be useful must be impartial ; else it becomes the instrument of the very influence so to be avoided, instead of a defense against it. Executive partiality for one foreign nation, and executive dislike for another, cast those whom they allure to the danger only on one side, and leave in red and even dead the rest of influence on the other. Real patriots, who may repel the intrigues of the favorite, are liable to become suspected and odious ; while its tools and dupes usurp the applause and confidence of the people, to surrender their interests.

The great rule of conduct for us in regard to foreign nations, is in extending our commercial relations, to have with them as little political connection as possible. So far as we have already formed

engagements, let them be fulfilled with perfect good faith. Here let us stop.

Europe has a set of primary interests, which it will have none, or a very remote relation. Hence she must be engaged in frequent controversies, the causes of which are essentially foreign to our zone. Hence, therefore, it must be impossible to us to implicate ourselves by artificial ties, in the ordinary vicissitudes of her politics, or the ordinary combinaisons and collisions of her friendships, or enemies.

Our detached and distant situation, invades and enables us to pursue a different course. If we remain one people, under an efficient government, the period is not far off, when we may defy material injury from external annoyances ; when we may take such an attitude as will exclude the insidious, we may at any time resolve upon, to be fraternally respected ; when belligerent nations, under the impossibility of making acquisitions upon us, will not lightly hazard the giving us provocation ; when we may choose peace or war, as our interest, guided by justice, shall counsel.

Why forego the advantages of so precious a situation ? Why quit our own to stand upon foreign ground ? Why, by interweaving our destiny with that of any part of Europe, entangle our peace and prosperity in the nets of European ambition, rivalship, interest, honor, or caprice ?

Fix our true policy in these clear of permanent alliances, with any portion of the foreign world. I say, I mean, as we are now at liberty to do it ; for let me not be understood as capable of giving infidelity to existing engagements. I hold the maxim no less applicable to public than to private affairs, that honor is above every policy. I repeat therefore, that those engagements be observed in their genuine sense. But in my opinion, it is unnecessary, and would be unwise to extend them.

Taking care always to keep up, by suitable establishments, an efficient defensive policy, we may find resort to temporary alliances for extraordinary emergencies.

Harmony, liberal intercourse with all nations, are recommended by policy, benevolence and interest. But every commercial policy should hold an equal and impartial hand ; neither seeking nor granting exclusive favor or preference, consulting the natural course of things, diffusing and diversifying, by gentle means, the streams of commerce, but

The front page of the April 19, 1800, issue of *Forlorn Hope*, regarded as the first prison newspaper in the United States. It was designed to resemble the newspapers that circulated in New York City at the time.

The campaign to end the imprisonment of debtors and to promote general prison reform was *Forlorn Hope*'s central mission. "I conceived no method so effectual as through the medium of the press, the most powerful of all engines," wrote Keteltas. He believed that an "enlightened legislature need only be made thoroughly acquainted with the injustice, impolicy, and inhumanity arising from imprisonment for debt, to do it away."⁹ While he may have been overly optimistic, a legislator reading his paper would have quickly become acquainted with the plight of the debtor.

One issue, for example, offered an account from a subscriber who lived near the jail who witnessed the arrival of a prisoner, jailed for a debt of seven dollars owed to his father. The reader wrote that he had been aroused late at night by the commotion in the prison yard. Upon inquiring as to the cause of the disturbance, he came across a party delivering a young man to jail. The youth had made every effort to accommodate his father, he wrote. "In vain, he lamented, he entreated, he raged and threatened, but his father was inexorable and confinement was his lot." The prisoner soon complained of hunger and thirst, "and begged for refreshment, but the father forbid his being supplied with a morsel but at his own expense." Not having any money or credit, the prisoner went hungry. "Thus poverty is made a crime," concluded the reader, whom *Forlorn Hope* referred to as a "Gentleman of Veracity." "No man of common sensibility can view the locks, bolts, bars, fetters and chains employed to confine his species, without blushing for the depravity and wickedness of the human race."¹⁰

Keteltas's chief contention, found in the pages of his paper, was that the debtor laws were the instrument of one person's oppression of another. In an article, part of a long series on the subject, he wrote that among the primary objects of law is the protection of the weak "from the insults of the strong." A law that puts people behind bars for failing to meet their financial obligations to another was the same as giving one individual absolute power over another's life and liberty. "It is an insult to common sense to say we are a free people in this state,"¹¹ he wrote.

Legal advances that might bring freedom to debtors were often prominently featured in the paper. In one issue, Keteltas recounted the jubilation in the New York prison upon hearing that Congress had passed the

Bankruptcy Law, which might bring an early release for some of the inmates. "The manner in which the celebration was conducted, will evince the comfort received from this ray of light, piercing the darksome abode of a prison." As a means of illustration, Keteltas reprinted some of the toasts given by inmates at the celebration. One inmate, for instance, raised his drink with the following toast:

The expiring debtors, under the weight of their afflictions in the different prisons in this and other states, whom this law cannot relieve - a bright and better world than this be their inheritance.¹²

Humor was an important part of Keteltas's weaponry. Typical of *Forlorn Hope*'s barbs against the jailing of debtors was a laconic correspondence between mother and son, carried in the April 19, 1800, issue:

Dear Son,
I am in Jail,
Yours,

Dear Mother,
God help you, so am I.
Yours,¹³

The political temperament in New York was sympathetic to Keteltas's aims. In fact, it was the subscribers who made it financially possible for him to publish his paper. Subscriptions were sold for three dollars a year, one dollar in advance, and could be remitted at two different New York addresses.¹⁴ The growing prison reform movement in the city in recent years had focused its attention on those inmates imprisoned for debt. The twenty-four active members of the Society for the Relief of Distressed Debtors, organized in 1787, tried to make sure that debtors in jail received food, fuel, and clothing. The Howard Association, named after the noted British prison reformer, was also formed to aid inmates in New York prisons. According to a write-up in *Forlorn Hope*, the association pledged legal assistance to the destitute, both in and out of jail.

In addition to support for prison reform, abolitionist sentiments ran high in the city. The growing national dispute over slavery spilled onto the pages of the paper. In an April 1800 issue, the following advertisement appeared:

FOR SALE
A SMART, Healthy NEGRO WENCH,

about twenty years of age,
capable of doing all kinds
of housework. Enquire at No. 15,
Murray Street.¹⁵

It was repeated in the following issue but accompanied by a letter from an angry reader. “A *slave* for sale in the FORLORN HOPE! Is it possible!” he wrote. “Great God what blindness! What insensibility! How inconsistent is man! That the chastisement inflicted on him by his Maker, to correct his faults, should serve only to confirm him in the wrong.”

Keteltas offered an apology, somewhat disingenuously, that he had taken the advertisement hoping that it would “invite some able pen to show, [{possible}, that a difference of complexion in the human race, makes a difference in the Rights of Man.” And Keteltas promised he would take no pay for running such an advertisement. Rather, in the future, anyone who would advertise for sale “the fable sons and daughters of Africa, in the *Forlorn Hope*, must expect those of the descendants free’d and educated in this country, will be permitted through the same medium, to offer their objections to this degraded state and conditions of their friends and relatives.”¹⁶ It was a sort of colonial equal-time provision. No other advertisement ever appeared.

More in keeping with Keteltas’s professed views, a letter written by James Forten to Congressman George Thatcher was prominently reprinted in late May 1800. Forten, whom Keteltas explained was a “man of color,” wrote Thatcher to thank him for his support of a petition from free blacks. His letter “contained real marks of expansion of mind, which the African race are capable of,” wrote Keteltas. In his letter, Forten wrote:

When the hand of sorrow, presses heavy on us, and the generality of mankind turn, unpitying from our complaints, if one appears who feels for, and commiserates our situation, endeavors in all his power to alleviate our condition, our bosoms swell with gratitude, and our tongues instinctively pronounce our thanks for the obligation.... Though our faces are black, yet we are men - and though many amongst us cannot read, because our rulers have thought it proper to keep us in ignorance, yet we all have the feelings and passions of men, (and) are as anxious to enjoy the birth-right of the human race, as those from our ignorance draw an argument against our petition.¹⁷

Because it championed two causes dear to reform-minded New Yorkers, *Forlorn Hope* garnered support in the city. After four months of publication, Keteltas wrote that “the subscribers to the paper have exceeded my most sanguine expectations, for the time, and all that is wanting, is a little exertion

of my friends to procure me subscriptions, and advertisements and make the solicited advance.”¹⁸

Aside from those items promoting its causes, *Forlorn Hope* carried news from abroad as well as from other states. The inside pages were dotted with dispatches from Germany, Italy, and France. Most were reports on the latest battles and conquests. Items about the new federal government were also considered news. The issue of May 31, 1800, for instance, carried a report that the president of the United States would leave town that day, “and the government offices it is expected will be removed this week to the Federal city, the seat of government in future.”¹⁹

The paper also reported on deaths of both prominent people and those whose lives might have had some connection with prison life. Here is, for example, the entire obituary devoted to one such latter soul.

Mr. Collins, near the State Prison, tired of life, shot himself.²⁰

In early April 1800, *Forlorn Hope* published an article suggesting that perhaps a way could be found for prisoners to pay off their debts, usually small in size, rather than languishing in prison. To illustrate how meager the debts were, the author wrote that the Philadelphia prison contained 236 prisoners whose aggregate debt was only a little over \$573. Keteltas’s point was correct: most debtors that were jailed owed little. But his figures were wrong. There were two relative newcomers. Robert Morris, along with his partner John Nicholson, had joined the Philadelphia prison for debts totaling in the millions of dollars. And unbeknownst to Keteltas, the two had also begun publishing a prison newspaper, three days earlier.

Morris had been an important figure in the colonies’ struggle for independence. His work in raising money for the rebellious government earned him the historian’s nickname of “financier of the American Revolution.” In recent years, however, his high-rolling style of “money making had gotten him in trouble. He had overextended himself in a series of land deals. After one of them, in the new federal city, collapsed, he found himself strapped with a debt just short of \$3 million. In February of 1798 he was led off to the prison.

John Nicholson, a land speculator par excellence, had been Morris’s partner and friend since the 1780s, when Morris was the chair of the Secret Committee of Trade of the Continental Congress and superintendent of finance under the Articles of Confederation. “Nicholson and Morris may be considered speculative symbols of the 1790s,” wrote Nicholson’s

biographer, Robert D. Arbuckle.²¹ The land speculator was both a hero and a villain in the society at the time, according to Arbuckle. Nicholson and Morris's land sale promotions spurred the opening of frontier lands and inspired many to seek a new life. However, once there the settlers often found that the best lands had been kept for later sale when the migration increased their value.

Unfortunately for the pair, they owned too much land, it sold too slowly, and they owed too much money. Nicholson alone controlled more than 4 million acres in western Pennsylvania but owed more than \$12 million for his purchases, according to records. "Each was deluded with the hope that the cure for their ills was just around the corner," wrote Arbuckle, "but like flies caught in a web, the more they struggled, the more entangled they became."²²

Nicholson, who had at first avoided the fate that befell his partner, was arrested in August of 1799 and was brought to the jail where Morris already had been residing for a year and half. The three-story jail, alternately known as the Walnut Street Prison, the Prune Street Jail, and "the hotel with the grated door," as Morris liked to refer to it, was located one block from the Capitol where the Congress met. Built in 1773, it had housed British prisoners during the War for Independence and criminals during the early years of the new nation. An annex was constructed on the Prune Street side in 1790 to house debtors.

The area reserved for debtors was quite apart from that maintained for criminals. As in other debtor prisons, the accommodations varied with one's ability to pay. All debtors, however, seemed to have had access to a neatly laid out and well-kept garden "affording an agreeable promenade for the luckless inhabitants of the Bastille."²³ Morris was said to have walked in the garden every day to maintain his health. In fact, the inmates moved about considerably, as the cells were not locked until 9 P.M. The presence of Morris, however, was certainly noticed. In fact, a few months after he began his residence at the prison, none other than General George Washington came to call for dinner on his way to meet with the Continental Congress.

The newspaper was Nicholson's idea. The extent of Morris's involvement with the paper is not known. It seems likely considering he and Nicholson's friendship, the boredom of prison, and his writing skills that Morris probably lent a hand. Nicholson started it as a means to pay the rent for his family and meet the expenses of prison life. Under Pennsylvania law, his creditors were

required to pay him seven cents a day if he had no other funds. His expenses, however, were considerably more, especially as his family rented a house two blocks away. Appropriately the paper was called the *Supporter*, or *Daily Repast*. The *Supporter* was not a prison paper in the sense that *Forlorn Hope* was. Rather, it was simply a newspaper whose publisher was in prison. It made no effort to carry material about prison life. In fact, it tried to avoid any appearance that it was connected to the Walnut Street Prison.

The first issue came out in early April 1800 and was published daily until September 19, when it became a weekly. In an early issue, Nicholson wrote that it was only because he was “imprisoned for debt, and having anxiously reflected and considered in what way his services in this state of confinement might best be employed to procure subsistence for himself and a numerous family, that look to him for SUPPORT, hath determined upon publishing a daily paper....” He promised to be an impartial editor and “would endeavor to enrich his columns so as to make them afford also a Daily Repast, to his readers and public.”²⁴ The paper contained mainly reprints of the news of the day such as reports on European events, robberies, and the price of goods.

To print the paper, Nicholson first sought out Grace Raketon of Philadelphia, but in the end he persuaded a series of printers to do the work. For the first month, Isaac Ralston printed the paper, but for the majority of its life, the *Supporter* was printed by Robert and Francis Bailey. The Baileys were prominent printers. They had been the official printers of the Congress and the state of Pennsylvania and, in 1781, had begun to edit and publish the *Freeman's Journal*, or the *North American Intelligencer*, an influential publication in the young republic.

Nicholson sold the paper for six cents an issue, two dollars for a three-month subscription, and eight dollars for the year. It got off to a good start, bringing in \$964.10 with expenses of only \$252.94. Dr. Enoch Edwards, Nicholson's friend and one of the earliest subscribers, suggested that he use the paper to defend his actions and seek his release. Nicholson refused, deciding instead to stick to his plan of producing a commercial paper with news of the day.

The paper had a number of prominent subscribers. John Adams, for instance, then president, subscribed. References to the paper show up in one of the most remarkable diaries we have from the era, kept daily by Elizabeth Drinker, a prominent Philadelphian who was friends with both Morris and

Nicholson. Her husband, Henry Drinker, was active with the Philadelphia Society for Alleviating the Miseries of Public Prisons and had campaigned since 1787 for better conditions. On June 9th, 1800, Elizabeth Drinker wrote in her diary, “visited John Nicholdson [sic] in prison to day, engaged to take his news-paper, poor man, what a reverse of fortune, from affluence to a Jail.”²⁵ Drinker evidently also read the paper because two weeks later she quotes at length a report from the *Supporter* that Philadelphia might escape another episode of the deadly yellow fever that had ravaged the city in previous summers.

Despite its good start, the *Supporter*’s life came to end with that of its founder in December of 1800. “John Nicholdson [sic] died in debtor’s apartment a day or two ago,” wrote Drinker on December 7, “poor Man, he has paid his last debt.” Morris chose not to continue the newspaper and was released in 1801 under the provisions of the new federal Bankruptcy Act passed the year before.

In New York, meanwhile, Keteltas found he had a competitor. The Society for the Relief of Distressed Prisoners had decided to start a paper with much the same idea as Nicholson - to make money. The profits of the paper, according to an early issue, would be turned over to the society to aid in its work. More than eighty prisoners were “looking up to this society for their daily bread,”²⁶ wrote editor William Sing, a free man. After visiting a number of prisons he decided to establish the paper to raise money. “But,” as Sing explained, “a considerable obstacle appeared —A paper entitled the *Forlorn Hope*, was already issued by Mr. Keteltas.” Sing said he made two efforts to convince Keteltas to give up his paper and transform it “into the principle and design of the *Prisoner of Hope*”²⁷ as he would call his paper. But Keteltas refused.

Sing, nonetheless, launched his paper, which looked just like *Forlorn Hope* and also featured articles promoting an end to imprisonment for debt. But unlike Keteltas’s paper, it was not the genuine article. Keteltas apparently circulated a pamphlet or leaflet explaining that fact and warning readers not to confuse the two. Sing, who became increasingly belligerent, replied in a letter published in the *Daily Advertiser*. Keteltas also reprinted the entire interchange in his paper.

Sing, in his letter, asked the public to “suspend their opinion respecting” what he called “some false insinuations” found in a handbill “tending to depreciate in the public estimation a late print entitled *Prisoner of Hope*?”²⁸

Keteltas responded. “In attempting to establish a News Paper in a prison, many were the embarrassment which presented, as must naturally be supposed - but the desire of regaining my liberty, restoring it to others and removing a blot from our civil code, triumphed over all difficulties,” he wrote.²⁹ But now, an outsider with sympathetic aims was trying to destroy his paper.

Keteltas put several questions in public to Sing. First, he asked, did Sing not approve of the idea of *Forlorn Hope* when he was first told of it? Second, did Sing not offer to buy it from him and was refused? As Keteltas said, the answers to both questions were yes. Sing could only be trying to get rid of any possible competition. “In your conversation since about the paper you have issued,” wrote Keteltas to Sing, “you have declared to me and others, that your first object was to obtain a handsome living by the press, and the surplus (if any) to go under the direction of the Humane Society for the relief of prisoners.”³⁰

Sing denied it. He wrote that he had not intended “to introduce to the world anything like an opposition print.”³¹ Therefore he had only offered to buy *Forlorn Hope* because he was set on having a paper to help prisoners. The exchange of letters continued in other issues, and again were reprinted in *Forlorn Hope*. But Keteltas apparently wanted to end the public debate between the two, especially as it was taking on a personal and vicious tone. At one point, for instance, he felt obliged to print a letter in *Forlorn Hope* denying that he had altered his mother’s will as Sing had charged. Sing’s challenge did not last long. He changed the frequency of his paper’s appearance several times, and in August it appeared that he was having difficulty making it pay. On August 23, 1800, it was discontinued after having published twenty-eight issues.

Of these three early newspapers, only two could really be called prison newspapers, and *Forlorn Hope* was the only one proud of its origins. As a result it was the most spirited and most interesting to read. Keteltas’s paper today provides rich insights into the reformist temperament of the times. One essay, for example, was titled “Original Thoughts on Female Education.” The author explained that in educating women the “heart ought to be the chief object of attention. Not that the understanding is to be neglected,” of course. But, he warned “novels and romances, in particular are a dangerous sort of reading, tending to excite false ideas in the mind.”³²

Forlorn Hope also published inmate literature. Inmate poetry is something that all prison papers have continued to publish since *Forlorn Hope* began. And, as in most later inmate publications, the subject of the poems Keteltas selected was prison life. For instance, the May 10 issue featured the following poem, signed only “A Prisoner.”

The Neglected Prisoner

Hard is the wretch's lot, condemn'd to pine
And mourn unheeded in a prison's gloom
Who sees no ray of hope to cheer his mind,
And must submit, in silence to his doom.
What tho's his num'rous friends he once could boast
The gay companions of his playful hours,
Friends whom he fondly lov'd and valued most?
Ah! sure they felt not friendship's sacred powers.
Some friends, like leaves of summer, on th'approach
Of winter's storms and stern misfortunes' blast
Drop off and leave us, nor endure the touch
And test that weighs the present by the past.
Yet shall the mind unknowing guilt of shame
Remember well these cold neglectful friends,
And feel a sentiment too warm to name
Till this resentment or his mem'ry ends.

Keteltas also printed anecdotes for his readers' amusement. Today they read like *Reader's Digest* humor. One, in the July 12 issue, recounted the story of a Dr. P. who “was remarkably ugly, and had a very elegant seat.” He told a friend that he thought his seat would be a “nice marriage trap.” Yes, replied his friend, “but I am afraid that no lady will relish the bait.”³³

The latest issue of *Forlorn Hope* that survives in archives is dated September 13, 1800. Keteltas had hinted at financial trouble in an earlier issue when he wrote that subscribers had “generally paid” him. It is possible that the paper closed simply because Keteltas could no longer pay his printer’s bill. The paper carried less and less advertising and the second-to-last issue carried only one advertisement.

It is also possible that Keteltas closed the paper for an entirely different reason. Earlier that year the Congress passed the Bankruptcy Act, and a number of debtors were winning their release under the provisions of the act. Keteltas, a lawyer, may have been one of the first. Proof that he did not languish in prison came in an exchange of letters between him and Robert

Livingston years later. Keteltas was out of prison when he wrote to the prominent American, but he had hardly changed. He was writing to see about a loan to tide him over.³⁴

Chapter 2

When Luceppa Bared Her Bosom

“Prison literature,” that is, the literature produced in prison and emanating thence, has, perhaps, been among the beneficial that is extant.... Men seem, like certain herbs, to emit their sweets only as they are trodden on; and the prison and the dungeon are the alembics in which they are distilled, and whence flow, the richest and most exquisite emanations of the human mind.

—Joseph Chandler, addressing the 1870 Cincinnati American Prison Congress

William Keteltas established the first prison newspaper in the United States, but not prison journalism. That took another eighty-three years. Instead of to Keteltas, modern prison journalism owes its beginnings to the prison reform movement of the late nineteenth century. As the century unfolded, imprisonment of the type to which Keteltas had been subjected was slowly being abolished. Failing to pay your creditors no longer got you a speedy invitation to jail. In 1817, New York raised the minimum debt for which a man could be jailed to twenty-five dollars. Four years later Kentucky abolished all imprisonment for debt, and other states quickly followed suit. By 1848 the practice had been entirely abandoned.

Though the practice of jailing debtors waned, the use of imprisonment as a form of punishment became increasingly popular. Prisons had long served as tools of retribution. However, they had been historically reserved to confine vagrants and other minor offenders whose crimes did not justify capital or severe corporal punishment. Traditionally most convicted criminals had been put to death, or if their crimes did not merit the hangman’s noose (few did not) they would face mutilations, flogging, or branding.

In the aftermath of the Revolution, reformers decided that such punishments were not fitting of the new age of enlightenment. The Quakers of Pennsylvania were the first to lead the way. In the twenty years following

the War for Independence they succeeded in substituting imprisonment for death in most offenses except first-degree murder. In 1790, the Walnut Street Prison, which had confined Robert Morris and John Nicholson, was reconstructed so that the Quaker penological ideas (imported in great part from Europe) could be tried. The new addition was called a penitentiary house, literally a place to do penance. “The penitentiary,” wrote prison historian Blake McKelvey, “was one of the byproducts of the intellectual and humanitarian movements of the eighteenth century that contributed so generously to the founding of the American nation.”¹

Its supporters believed that the penitentiary would reform criminals by isolating them from each other and other infectious influences. By 1835, most criminal codes in the United States had been revised, and imprisonment now took the place of the traditional forms of punishment. But for many criminals, these new places of confinement were not much of an improvement over past practices. In Simsbury, Connecticut, for example, prisoners were thrust into an abandoned mine at night “with their feet fast to iron bars and their bodies attached by chains around the neck to a great beam above.”² In Maine, at the state prison, inmates were kept in pits accessible only by way of a ladder dropped through a grated iron door.

The new punishments, moreover, could “boast of no great mitigation of crime,” said McKelvey.³ The new prisons did, however, breed a new wave of reformers appalled at these atrocities. “Actual conditions in the old jails, now serving as catchalls for all varieties of offenders, the reformers found to be far from conducive to the regeneration of the prisoners,” noted Alice Felt Tyler in her book on early American social history.⁴ It took, however, until after the Civil War for these new reformers to make any real progress. The sudden swelling of the prison populations following the war (perhaps due to the displacement caused by the ravages of the war in the South and industrialization in the North) focused public attention on criminal justice. In 1850, there was 1 prisoner to 3,448 inhabitants in the United States. By 1880, that ratio rose to 1 prisoner to 855 inhabitants ([Figure 2.1](#)).

The need for more adequate prisons provided the opportunity the reformers had been seeking. Buoyed by the growing acceptance of their ideas, reformers, prison officials, and philanthropists gathered in Cincinnati in October 1870 for the first American Prison Congress. The assembly, convened by noted reformer Enoch Wines, was a remarkable event. The influence of the gathering would be felt in all the states. It represented “a

landmark in the modern American prison reform movement," said S. J. Barrows, who became a leading reformist in the years following.⁵

Governor Rutherford B. Hayes welcomed the 130 or so delegates to his state. They represented twenty-four states, and some had come from as far away as South America. A Utopian spirit dominated the talk of the meeting.

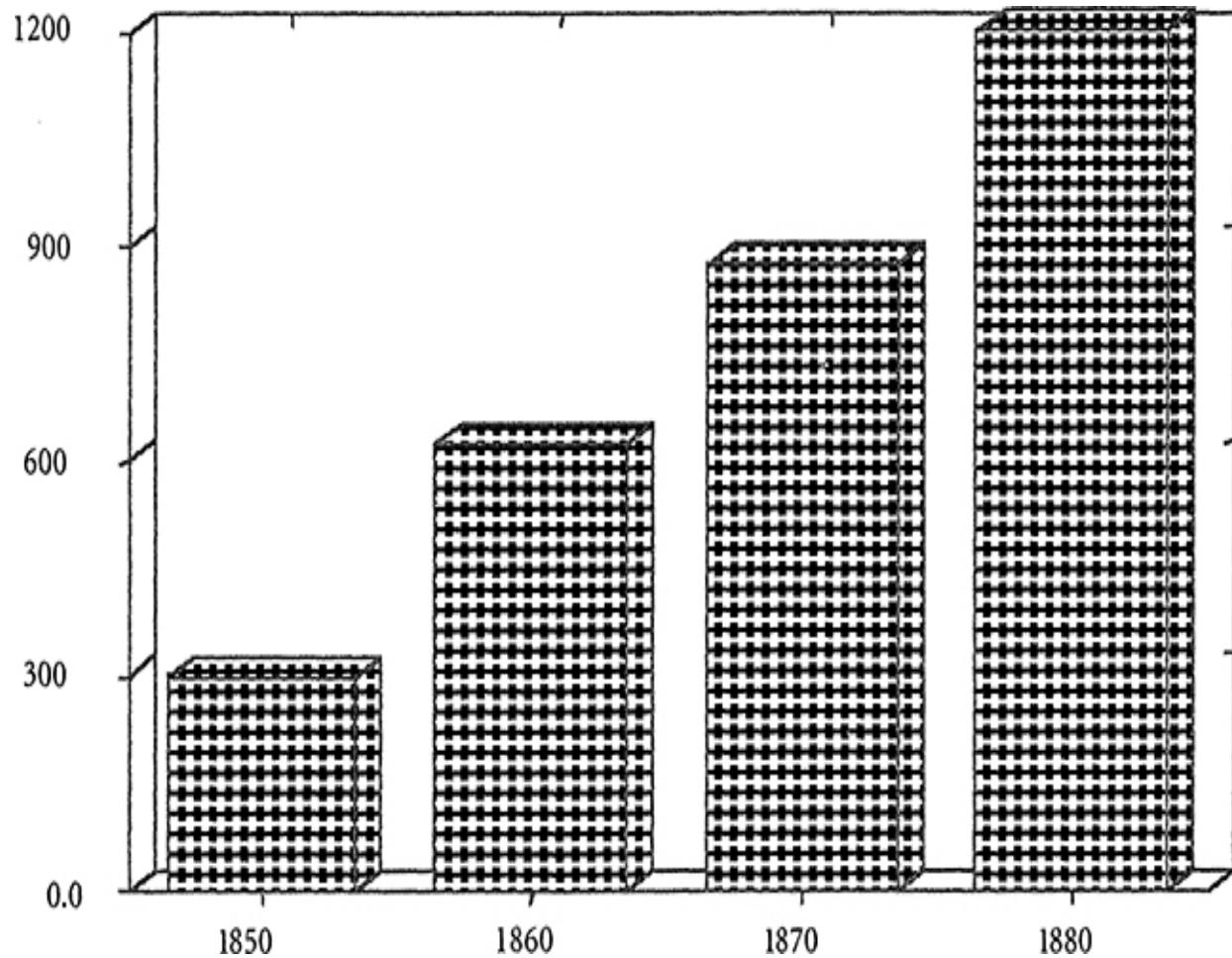


Figure 2.1 Number of prisoners per 1,000,000 inhabitants, United States 1850–1880.

Some forty papers, on topics ranging from the radical new theory of indeterminate sentencing to the old problem of prison hygiene, were presented. The published proceeding became regarded as the textbook of prison science. McKelvey noted that delegates felt they were charting a new course.

Indeed, the delegates concerned themselves largely with the future, and after eagerly discussing many papers and addresses they unanimously adopted a declaration of principles so forward-looking that for several decades their successors were able neither to better it in theory nor to exhaust its possibilities in practice.⁶

Front and center of this charged assembly was Zebulon Reed Brockway, a forty-three-year-old superintendent of the Detroit House of Corrections with a long, tufted beard growing primarily from his chin. His paper “Ideal for a True Prison System for a State” brought together the most progressive ideas of his era. “The central aim of a true prison system is the protection of society against crime, not the punishment of the criminal,” Brockway told the delegates. “Punishment, the instrument, protection, the object.”⁷

Thus, argued Brockway, a prison system must have as its central goal the reformation of criminals. To accomplish this, he proposed that states set up independent commissions to build and operate reformatories (whose name, like that of penitentiaries, reflected the new thinking). Discipline within the new institutions would be regulated with grades and marks, permitting the inmates to progress through several levels of classification on their way to freedom. Their date of release would be contingent on their progress. The paper prompted excited debate and, in the end, formed the keystone of the meeting’s declaration of principles. Frederick H. Wines, the son of Enoch Wines, said twenty years later it was “the most remarkable paper read at the congress.”⁸ It was a heady moment. Brockway himself compared it to when the disciples witnessed the Transfiguration of Jesus. McKelvey wrote

In their enthusiasm for the ideal they [the delegates at the meeting] rose above the monotony of four gray walls, men in stripes shuffling in lockstep, sullen faces staring through the bars, coarse mush and coffee made of bread crusts, armed sentries stalking the walls. They forgot it all and voted for their remarkable declaration of principles.⁹

As the delegates plotted, devised, and described their various ideas for making new men and women out of the growing number of criminals, Joseph Chandler, of the Philadelphia Society for Alleviating the Miseries of Prisoners (the same group that worked to improve the Walnut Street debtors’ jail), first raised the idea of creating a newspaper especially designed for inmates. Chandler was a former congressman and newspaper publisher. He had recently returned from serving as minister to Naples, Italy. Since his return to the United States he had devoted his time to a variety of philanthropic projects, and prison reform was high among them. Before

coming to the congress, he had written a number of essays and pamphlets promoting the cause and was widely regarded as one of the cadre.

“Can a newspaper, specially designed for the use of prisoners, be made of considerable moral use?” Chandler asked the delegates. “If so, it ought to be established by any available means, and sustained at any cost.”¹⁰ Inmates crave newspapers—they ask guards for them and request that visitors bring them, he said. “The strong desire of every man who can read to have a newspaper seems to justify the idea that a paper is a desirable, almost necessary, means of reaching the affections and thence the conscience of one who is suddenly and temporarily withdrawn from social intercourse.”¹¹ The real question, said Chandler, is how a newspaper can be made a tool in reforming criminals.

Obviously the newspapers of the free world would not do, he said. Their “disgusting details of vice and licentiousness … that blunts delicacy in the young and encourages indecency and crime” could undo the prison’s work of making honest citizens of its wards.¹² “The sensational yellow journals, with their exaggerated delineations of crime, their atrocious stories appealing to scoundrels, are not allowed in any well conducted prison,” wrote reformer Isabel Barrows, the wife of S. J. Barrows, several years later.¹³ “The admission of the daily newspaper in 1870 would have been considered a conspiracy against the safety of the prison,” said a warden at a later prison congress.¹⁴

Brockway, too, was opposed to introducing outside newspapers to inmates. “We all know,” he said, “that two-thirds of the reading in newspapers consists of accounts of crimes and other outrageous transactions that no decent man ought to read, and least of all, prisoners.”¹⁵ But Brockway favored some means of informing inmates of the goings-on in the world outside because, as he said later, he wanted the new reformatory to “be the analogue of civil society government for the double purpose of training and testing the inmates for freedom.”¹⁶

To the modern reader, the impassioned debate about whether an inmate should be permitted to read a newspaper may seem almost silly. However, at the time, the newspaper was only just becoming a “common denominator in American life,” according to media historian Thomas Leonard. In the short time span from 1865 to 1901, industrialization would transform the nation from a loose collection of small, separate, and distinct communities into a single market giving rise to, among other things, a mass media. Simply put,

it was the period in which modern America emerged.¹⁷ Corporations and mass production created a continental market in all aspects of life. Clothing became more uniform, foods lost their ethnic diversity, and a mass medium, which began to flourish at this time, nationalized literary and cultural tastes. By 1900 there would be twenty daily newspapers in circulation for every one at the end of the Civil War. Secondly, the debate about the appropriateness of what was contained in these new publications may seem more understandable when compared with similar debates later in American history over the content of movies, television, and even the Internet. In penology, for instance, this same debate was repeated in the 1950s when television began to be introduced into prisons.

If no publication from the outside then could be trusted, “it follows there should be a paper specially adapted to the wants of the prisoners,” argued Chandler.¹⁸ “The advantage of such a paper must be almost incalculable as a common channel of information; a common means of reaching the consciences of the tenants of prisons; a common form of expression for their sentiments, purposes and hope.”¹⁹

Such a newspaper should contain the current news “with all corrupting and therefore objectionable details eliminated.” Items of life outside that illustrate “those great and fundamental universal principles in religion and morals, which are common to all churches,” should also be included. The paper must also aid the schoolmaster, the librarian, and the chaplain in their work, the last in “enforcing his moral lessons.” But the “final and controlling argument for the prison newspaper,” concluded Chandler, is that prisons were creating Rip Van Winkles.

A knowledge of passing events, of the questions and strifes that enlist men’s tongues and pens, of the habits of thought and action inwrought into the life of the hour, of the opinions that prevail in society, of the principles and modes of business and labor in a word, contact of some kind with the living world is essential to fit any man to enter successfully into the keen rivalries that mark the civilization of this busy, bustling, progressive age.²⁰

How can a prisoner be expected to reenter the outside world when his mind, like his body, was kept from it? asked Chandler. “A carefully, skillfully, ably edited newspaper, made up with special reference to the prisoner’s circumstances and needs, would go far to meet these wants and qualify him for a return the world.”²¹

As parting advice, Chandler suggested that a prison newspaper must be carefully assembled so as not to offend or startle the inmate. Rather the prison newspaper must help lure the inmate back to the good life with gentleness. When Luceppa saw her darling child teetering on the edge of a precipice, said Chandler, she did not cry out his name and thus startle him and cause him to fall. “She forgot her maternal dignity, wounded in the disobedience of her child.... She wished only the salvation of her infant; and so kneeling at a distance she bared her bosom, and the little one crept back to her and nestled near her heart.”²² With such a lofty goal in mind for a prison newspaper, even the congress’s organizer, Enoch Wines, proclaimed himself in favor of it, “from which everything not proper for the ear should be excluded,” of course.²³

At the end of the conference, delegates flocked to Wines to sign up as charter members of the National Prison Association, and a modern professional class of prison administrators was born. The following year, the U.S. Congress was convinced to approve a call to all nations of the world to send delegates to an international version of the Cincinnati congress to be held in London in 1872. New York was one of the first states to take up the reformers’ plans. The year before the prison congress, the legislature designated a 250-acre farm outside of Elmira as the site for a new kind of penal institution. As the Walnut Street Prison had been the cradle of the penitentiary, this new reformatory would become - in the words of Frederick Wines - the “practical exemplification” of the 1870 principles.²⁴ It would also be the site of the reformers’ first experiment with a prison newspaper.

Chapter 3

The Summary

The time will come when every punitive institution in the civilized world will be destroyed and all places for the treatment of crimes be hospitals, schools, workshops and reformatories.

—The *Summary*, editorial page masthead

Great things were expected from the new reformatory rising, in the early 1870s, on the edge of a hill outside Elmira, a quiet, small, upstate New York town whose only previous brush with fame had been during the time Mark Twain resided there. The architecture of the building alone drew attention. A massive structure with Victorian gabled roofs, it could be seen from anywhere in the valley.

Zebulon Reed Brockway, who had played a critical role in the 1870 American Prison Congress and was by now widely regarded as the father of the new penology, was offered the post of Elmira's first warden in May 1876. It was a job he could not turn down. "The concrete exposition of penological principles furnished by the founding and furthering of the Elmira Reformatory affords, doubtless, the most tangible beginning of the later American prison reform," he later wrote.¹ Among his first tasks was writing the bill for the legislature that would spell out the tasks of the new reformatory (the very word reflects the success of the reform movement). Elmira would accept only first-time offenders between the ages of 16 and 30. An inmate's progress along the path of rehabilitation would be charted using a grading system. To assist the inmate, the reformatory would offer organized trade instruction, athletics, and schooling. Giving in entirely to Brockway's demands, lawmakers further agreed to provide a form of indeterminate sentencing.

In July 1876, thirty inmates were transferred from the Auburn Prison. For the next four years the model reformatory looked more like a work camp as

inmates were drafted to complete the construction, according to historian Alexander W. Pisciotta. “A number of formidable tasks confronted Brockway; these needed to be addressed before prison science could even be contemplated.”² By 1880, Brockway was able to inform the New York legislature that the main construction was complete, and he turned his attention from “building structures to building men,” wrote Pisciotta.³

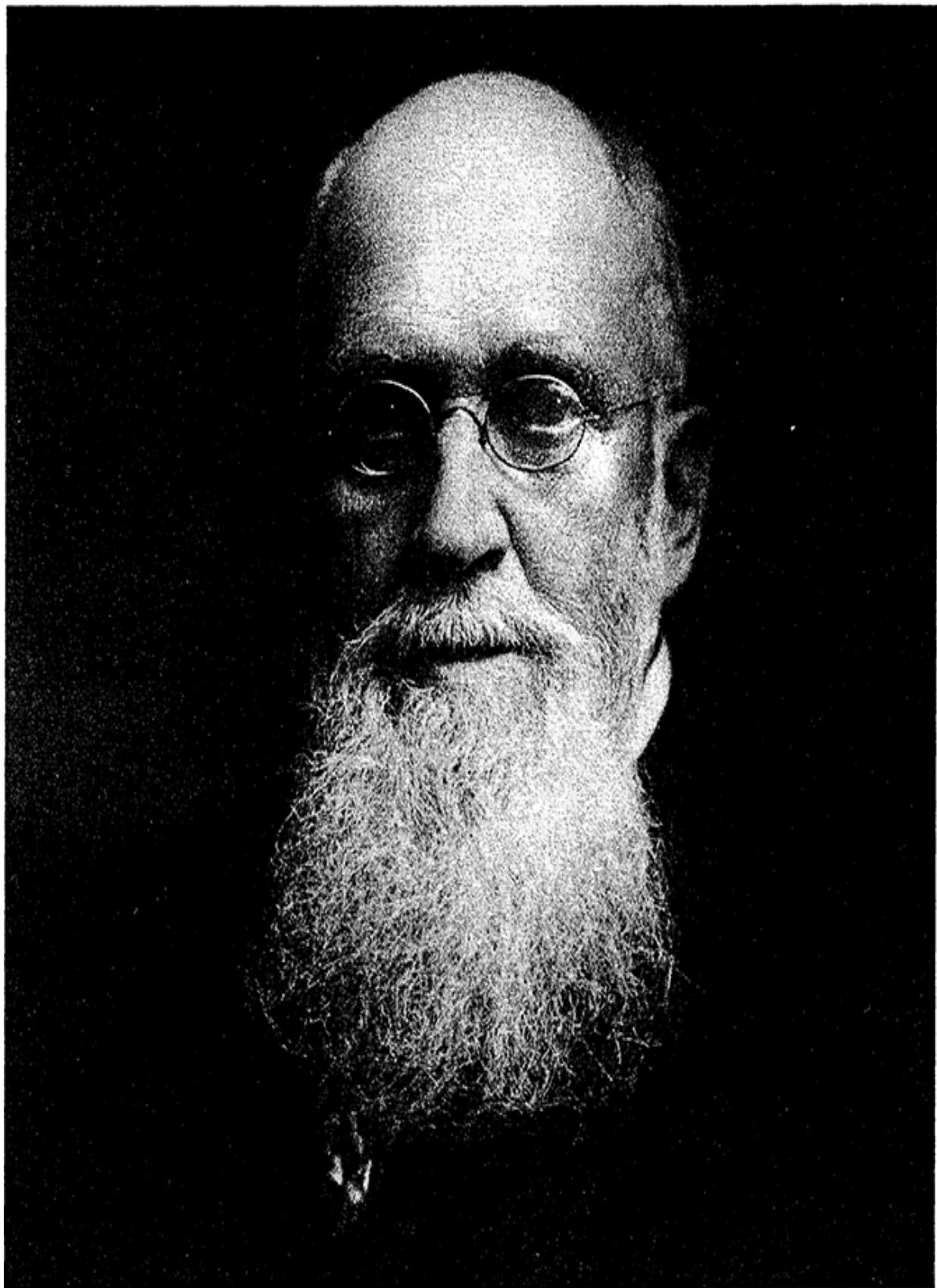
Other states watched closely, and visitors came from around the world. Within a few years both Massachusetts and Ohio built their own reformatories replicating the Elmira approach. “Zebulon Brockway was the most important penologist in the United States; the Elmira Reformatory was the world’s model correctional institution,” wrote Pisciotta.⁴ There was, however, a chasm between what Elmira represented to the world and actual conditions in the reformatory. Pisciotta’s extensive research revealed that when Brockway’s paternal methods did not achieve sufficient cooperation from his wards, he resorted to brutal techniques including corporal punishment. This led Pisciotta to conclude that Elmira’s reputation was actually undeserved and Brockway was “merely the greatest salesman of his time.”⁵ It is more likely that Brockway was a pragmatic reformer with a tyrannical streak who abused his position of authority. “Brockway was not Captain Ahab stubbornly chasing an elusive ideal through a half,” writes McKelvey. “Rather he was a determined commander ever scanning the horizon for the blowing of a new idea that might help put character into the young men in his charge.”⁶

Among the ideas that had attracted Brockway’s attention at the 1870 American Prison Congress was Chandler’s proposal of creating an inmate newspaper. In 1883, seven years after the reformatory opened, two occurrences created the opportunity to turn this idea into reality. First, a Cottrell cylinder printing press was purchased to save money on institutional printing. Inmates were used to staff the print shop, and according to McKelvey, “a plan was hit upon of printing a weekly leaflet to digest the news of the daily papers that were excluded from the reformatory.”⁷ Until then, the only source of news from the outside had been weekly readings of censored, short extracts from newspapers at dinner. These readings, furthermore, had been restricted to only the inmates of the first (top) grade.

Second, Brockway had at his disposal an unusual assistant. A tall, bearded, athletic, Oxford-educated man named Macauley* had been sent to Elmira in 1880 on a burglary conviction. In June 1881, he was released on

parole but was returned within six months for violating the conditions. In 1883 he was released once again-this time, however, as Brockway explained, on the “condition that he take employment at the Reformatory on agreed wages, to remain thus more immediately under our supervision.”⁸ During the first months of his new parole, Brockway gave Macauley the task of organizing and editing the new prison newspaper, and the first issue appeared on November 29, 1883.

Four pages long, printed on seventeen-by-eleven-inch sheets, the *Summary* contained a hodgepodge of news. The first page told readers “strong authority” had reported that President Chester Arthur would seek reelection in 1884 (his party eventually selected another nominee) and that a statewide referendum had abolished contract labor in prison. Inside pages offered primarily inspirational words. One aspiring inmate-writer proffered the following bit of prose:



Zebulon Reed Brockway, a leading nineteenth-century prison reformer, created a prison newspaper for his model reformatory in Elmira, New York. (Photo: Brown Brothers.)

Let us cling to our duty, let us stand firm in this life's battle like yon proud oak, and the wave and storms of that boiling sea of humanity may rush and beat against us, they may overwhelm by distress but cannot disturb us - they may even destroy us, but can never, never hurt us....⁹

Letters from men on parole and some having completed their parole offered encouragement. "These will be interesting as showing what has been and may be accomplished by paroled men; and will no doubt frequently point a moral for those who are yet awaiting parole," wrote Macauley.¹⁰

Not much was said by way of an explanation to the inmates about the new periodical except for a short editorial. "We beg to say that the *Summary* has been established in the interest of you all; that its duty will be to interest and amuse you with many things grave and gay." It did admit, though, that it faced none of the problems that plagued new newspapers on the outside, such as an "overbearing printers' union" and nor would its "treasury be drained by mighty fees to purse-proud contributors."¹¹

From its inception, it was clear that the newspaper was carefully assembled not to include items that officials deemed to have a bad influence on the inmates, especially those from the world beyond the reformatory's gates. As an inmate-editor wrote in 1892, "much circumspection is used in the selection of the daily tidings, and the publication of any event which might tend to awaken the baser instincts, criminal or animal, of the inmates is carefully avoided."¹² For Brockway, that included "sensational court or criminal news ... horse racing, or prize fighting." The twin purposes of the *Summary*, he said, were

to furnish the Reformatory's inmates with the political, industrial, and social news of the world, and to thereby keep alive their interest in and patriotism for their country, and to inculcate, without sermonizing, ideas of thrift, enterprise, honesty, decency, and manliness.¹³

The newspaper was exactly what Chandler, who by now had died, would have wished for. It contained only sanitized news from the outside, flattering coverage of activities inside the prison, and a healthy dose of inspirational copy to encourage inmates to reform. Nonetheless the paper was apparently a hit with a number of inmates, at least those with a propensity to write. In the following issue, which appeared on Christmas Day, 1883, Macauley

reported that he had been deluged with “profuse congratulations and praises.” He also reported that manuscripts were pouring in. “The publication of the *Summary* broke the seal of inspiration for a host of literary men,” he wrote.¹⁴ Not all of it, as Macauley soon discovered, was original material. Among the first published contributions from inmates was a plagiarized article. “My brother scribes,” Macauley wrote in the following issue, “if you cannot essay anything depthy, be at least original and don’t fail to make use of quotation marks.”¹⁵

Only a third of the inmates could be said to possess the basic skills necessary to write, according to a contemporaneous study of the inmate population. In 1883, officials found that 19.5 percent of the inmates being admitted were illiterate; 49.9 percent could read and write with difficulty; 26.9 percent had gone to ordinary common school; and 3.7 percent had completed high school or more.¹⁶

The *Summary* had its greatest success outside of the prison. Reformers, eager for information about the new reformatory, wrote for copies. Because of their demand for the paper, it was decided to devote a page in each issue to the publication of penal reform news. Within a few issues the additional page was filled with articles by eminent reformers and “debates” on topics such as prison labor or sentencing practices. The first such page, which appeared in the January 27, 1884, issue, contained a symposium on prison labor written by five advocates of reform. Each had read the others’ essays before publication, and taken as a whole, the insert offered readers a learned discussion of whether prisoners should work and be compensated.

By its third issue, the *Summary* increased its size from four to eight pages, and its frequency from monthly to biweekly. It expanded its fare to include such wide-ranging articles as “Reminiscence of a Trip to England, Scotland, India, etc.” and “Electricity Under Difficulties.” The political events of the year outside the prison were extensively covered. The paper’s overblown sense of importance was certainly evident when its editorial proclaimed a neutral stance in the presidential election, no doubt to Grover Cleveland’s great relief. News was no longer restricted to items from outside the reformatory. Even complaints began to appear, such as the one written by the chaplain who was unhappy with the inmates’ practice of applauding in chapel with their hands and feet. The latter, he wrote, “is a poor way of expressing real satisfaction, besides it is decidedly vulgar.”¹⁷

The paper, however, did not stray from its role as one of Brockway's instruments of reform. "It is becoming one of the most valued of all the means in use here," Brockway wrote that year.¹⁸ "The purpose of the *Summary*;" read the redesigned masthead in July 1884, "is to provide a clean and truthful history of contemporary events.... Its constant endeavor shall be to approve the excellent, to condemn the bad, in all things that come properly within its sphere as a newspaper."¹⁹

In 1885, the *Summary* continued its growth. The increasing demand for the paper outside of the prison lead Brockway and Macauley to offer subscriptions at fifty cents a year. For a short while, a monthly edition of the paper was even published solely for outside readers. "Prominent writers contributed to this sheet," recalled Brockway, "and it soon acquired an almost world-wide circulation, and was rated and valued highly by those interested in the stupendous problems of criminology and prison reformation."²⁰

The size and editorial variety also continued to expand. Labor news began appearing with some regularity. The iron- and steelworkers' strike in Pittsburgh received fairly balanced coverage. The Pullman Company, on the other hand, which had built a paternalistic 600-acre village for its workers, was censured in an item reprinted from the *New York Sun*.

The neat and bright appearance of the cottages and thoroughfare is admired by the workmen when they visit it, but when they settle there they can soon discover as much poverty and even serfdom, as in any village in England tyrannized over by a duke or lord.²¹

The *Sun* was evidently a frequent source of news for the *Summary*. A subsequent issue, for instance, included an article taken from the *Sun* by Mark Twain on the topic of where Grant should be buried. Some day, Twain wrote, the West will unseat the District of Columbia as the seat of government, but as long as American civilization continues, New York will endure, making a logical resting place for the dead General.

Macauley and Brockway knew that their young newspaper was spawning a larger movement. It regularly acknowledged its imitators. "We have received a copy of the *Prison Press*, a paper published by the inmates of the Wapun, Wis. Also a copy of the *Echo*, a weekly paper published at the Central Prison, Ontario. The copy of this paper is written and then multiplied by the Cyclostyle. The publishers of the paper deserve great praise for their success under difficulties."²² The *Summary* also received its fair share of

compliments, and it did not hesitate to reprint them in its own pages. “Our modesty,” wrote Macauley, “we are forced to conclude, must be indestructible, else the many compliments which we are constantly receiving would mortally injure it.” The *Cornell Review*, published at nearby Cornell University, for instance, was quoted with relish. “If any college journal had but a fraction of the influence for good that the *Summary* has, it would deserve gilt edged and morocco binding.”²³

In 1886, the *Summary* was redesigned again by Macauley to include more “local” news and to devote increased space to “the publication of items distinctly bearing upon the question of social reform and disturbances, with special reference to the science of penology.”²⁴ Macauley, however, did not guide the development of the newspaper much longer. Although accorded special privileges, his stay at Elmira had not been without turmoil. While on his special parole he was married in 1883, but his new bride and he apparently did not get along very well. In 1884, as Brockway recalled, that “on complaint of his wife Macauley’s parole was again canceled and he was placed in custody within the enclosure.”²⁵ In November 1886, finally free to leave Elmira, Macauley departed for New York City. The following year he failed to show for his monthly meeting with his parole officer and was arrested. He persuaded the judge to release him before Elmira officers arrived and was never seen again.

He was replaced by F. J. Douglas, an inmate who had worked with Macauley and had served as the librarian for the reformatory. Douglas was a short man with, as Brockway wrote, “hands and feet strangely deformed, but with an excellent cranium.”²⁶ Douglas, at first, had been a difficult inmate. He had been abandoned by his parents and had spent many years in the protectory in Westchester. Following his release, he was convicted of burglary and sent to Elmira at age twenty. Brockway, in his paternalistic fashion, probably saw in Douglas a perfect candidate for his penological tutelage. After attending a lecture on morality in late 1884, Douglas was inspired to write a sonnet for the *Summary*. That experience developed in Douglas, reported Brockway, an “unusual literary taste and capability.” Brockway raised Douglas from the third grade (the lowest) to the highest, and Brockway said he soon became a “close reader of the best books” and a “ready writer.”²⁷

The biggest change in the *Summary* under Douglas was on the editorial page. He took a greater interest in current affairs than his predecessor and

wrote on all kinds of topics. According to Brockway, it was his skill in editorial writing that helped win his freedom. “The governor of the state on receiving the *Summary*’s criticism of his own veto message said ’Did a prisoner write that? If so, he ought to be pardoned,’” wrote Brockway. Douglas was eventually discharged as one of Brockway’s success stories. He found some modest journalism work, wrote Brockway, “but soon rose to a permanent remunerative place on the staff of a great metropolitan newspaper, where he remained continuously for a full twenty years until his death.”²⁸

Following Douglas’s departure in the late 1880s, perhaps 1890, the *Summary* remained as Macauley and he had designed it, and it continued to grow modestly. The Contents for an issue in 1891 provides an example of the kind of fare the *Summary* provided its readers (Table 3.1). Like any newspaper of the time, the *Summary* reflected the tenor of its era. For instance, a lecture by Professor Jenks of Cornell University, in which he argued that the smaller brain of the Negro made him unable to govern himself, provoked “unending arguments pro and con in the logic class and columns upon columns of contributions to the *Summary* by inmates.”²⁹

The editorial page also displayed a modest bit of courage in defending inmate rights. In 1893, for example, the *Summary* protested a New York State Court of Appeals decision to compel the immediate lockup of convicted murderers in solitary confinement in a state prison even if an appeal is sought. “As appeals generally require a year or more to be decided,” wrote the editor, “it is argued that if a prisoner is compelled to remain in solitary confinement for that length of time, their incarceration will be torture and will, in many cases, cause him to lose his reason.”³⁰

The *Summary*’s novelty and its usefulness in keeping reformers up to date on the latest penological fashions continued to keep it in demand outside of the reformatory. “It is more or less a curiosity in journalism,” wrote one of the editors in 1897, “in that in every detail it is solely the product of inmate labor and talent.”³¹ Congressmen, judges, and even university presidents, such as Cornell’s (“always glad to receive your excellent paper”) subscribed. But inside the prison, admitted the school superintendent in 1900, “probably very few of the inmates realize the value, to themselves, of a paper such as is laid before them every Saturday night. With some, no doubt, a paper maintained on these lines is unpopular.”³² It’s no surprise the *Summary* did not establish itself as an item of popular reading inside the prison. Its style

was increasingly haughty, reflecting the attitude of the officials who made it seem as if they were nobly stooping to save their brothers from a life of crime.

PENOLOGICAL		
Prison Reform in Minnesota	Rev. H. H. Hart	1
Insanity and Criminal Responsibility	Dr. J. M. Mosher	1
Prison Reform Notes		1
REFORMATION NEWS		
The Military Reorganization		1
Changes in the Library		8
Reformatory "Black Sheep"		8
Parole Court Notice		8
Programme for To-day		8
Minor Locals		8
LECTURES AND DEBATES OF THE WEEK		
The Value of Faith	Rev. T. K. Beecher	8
Christianity and Moral Philosophy	Prof. J. R. Monks	8
Free and Compulsory Education	Prof. C. R. Pratt	8
Rum Power in Politics	Prof. J. R. Monks	8
EDITORIAL		
Physical Training and Morals		4
The New Penology Defined		4
Causes of Juvenile Delinquency		4
The Capitalist, the Laborer, and the Law		4
Notes		4
NEWS OF THE WEEK		
July 22nd to July 28th, inclusive		5
SALMUGUNDI		
Changes in Pronunciation		2
Wagner's Popularity in London		2
Current American Poetry		2
Tyranny of the Novel		2
SOCIOLOGICAL		
Evidence of Criminal Statistics		3
Count Tolstoy on Meat-eating		3
Criminal Anthropology		3
Some Mistakes of Workingmen		3
Hypnotic Suggestion		3
Dr. Rainford, on the Saloon		3
TECHNOLOGICAL		
How to Succeed in the Plumber's Trade		6
Melting Cast-iron in Cupolas		6
TIMELY TOPICS		
Sunday Closing of the World's Fair		7
Homestead Labor Troubles		7
The Political Situation		7

Table 3.1 Contents of the *Summary*, July 30, 1891.

Aside from improvements in typography, a new Babcock Optimus press, and the introduction of photographs, the *Summary* remained essentially unchanged through its first twenty-five years. With the new press, however, the stylistic zinc etchings no longer appeared, making the paper seem grayer. In 1897, for example, the paper still proudly remarked that it provided “the inmates of the Reformatory items of clean, current news of the outside world (excluding all sensational or criminal items).” The *Summary*, the editor explained, wished to remain an “educator for the incarcerated.” And, although it changed a bit in the next century, it stayed close to its original charted course.³³

The significance of the *Summary*, however, is not in what it wrote about. Rather its significance is in its mere existence. The creation at the Elmira Reformatory of a prison newspaper produced by inmates legitimized an idea only previously discussed by reformers. It could no longer be said that inmates were not capable of producing a paper. The innovative features of the Elmira Reformatory were widely influential. In 1890, for example, the reformatory was the subject of a book by German author Alexander Winter. In 1891 his book was translated into English and sold widely in the United States. That same year, sixty-five members of the Ohio legislature, the lieutenant governor, and a gaggle of newspapermen traveled by train to Elmira to see in person this penal utopia. “In the United States the influence of the Elmira Reformatory has been felt throughout the country,” wrote S.J. Barrows in an article in 1900. “It has been copied in some states, and its ideas and methods have been applied with success to penitentiary and state prisons.”³⁴

The *Summary*’s success (in the eyes of the prison reform advocate) even caused Brockway to include the idea of a prison newspaper as one of his thirteen basic tenets presented before the International Prison Congress of 1910.³⁵ Its example lead to the establishment of other similar newspapers in at least a dozen states between 1880 and 1890. Most were started by reform wardens or chaplains, but in some cases they came about completely by the efforts of inmates.

*There is no record of his first name.

Chapter 4

The Reformists' Newspapers

The press of the country at large was almost unanimous in predicting that no good would come from publishing a prison paper, and that it would die an early death. Time has proved that those who thus prognosticated have had to chew the cud of disappointment, for today it is generally conceded that in those institutions where a prison paper is maintained it is an important factor for the intellectual improvement of its inmates.

— The *Reformatory* Press,
Anamosa, Iowa

The apparent success of Zebulon Brockway's widely admired Elmira Reformatory and its many novelties including the *Summary* spawned many imitators. "During the last five years a journalistic phenomena in the form of prison newspapers has sprung up," wrote an editor of the *Summary* in 1888. "Five years ago there were not, we believe, two newspapers published in the prisons throughout the United States. Today the list of prison papers would be a startlingly long one."¹ He was correct. By the end of the 1890s Connecticut, Rhode Island, New York, Massachusetts, New Jersey, Pennsylvania, Ohio, Indiana, Illinois, Iowa, Wisconsin, Minnesota, Kentucky, Texas, California, and possibly other states had established prison newspapers. "Prison papers are evidently coming to be more and more a fraternity by themselves," noted *Our Paper* of the Massachusetts Reformatory at Charlestown, Massachusetts, in 1899.²

Our Paper was typical of the kind of inmate newspaper created by Elmira's example, as was the institution where it was published. The Charlestown reformatory accepted its first inmates in 1884, seven years after Elmira. The buildings, erected in 1878, had been intended for use as a state prison before the infectious reform movement took hold of the legislature. It decided to turn the prison into a reformatory on Zebulon

Brockway's principles. Like Elmira, the new reformatory was situated on a three-hundred-acre farm. The buildings were surrounded by a twenty-four-foot brick wall. Three blocks of cells, radiating from a central guardroom, contained most of the inmates. A few prisoners, the more difficult ones, were kept in a smaller unattached building. Remodeled from its original plan, the reformatory contained classrooms, a lecture hall, a workshop, and a chapel. "The methods of the reformatory are not mysterious or magical," wrote Joseph E Scott, who was the assistant superintendent when it opened. "We find the church, the schoolhouse, and the workshop, and the elements which they represent is what the reformatory seeks to bring to its prisoners with a view to correct them to the moral, intellectual, and industrial conditions of the good citizens."³

As in Elmira, among the arsenal of reformatory tools was an inmate newspaper. The first issue of *Our Paper* was published on May 30, 1885, less than two years after the establishment of the *Summary*. It promised readers that it would be run for the "benefit of the inmates." But, it admitted, "it will be the medium of the Superintendent's suggestion, as it maybe that of inmates' contributions."⁴ In its first years it was more of the former than the latter, as Superintendent Colonel Gardiner Tufts insisted on editing the paper himself. "He put his whole heart into the paper," wrote Chaplain William Batt, who worked at the Reformatory for many years. "In his estimation it was one of the chief means of doing good in prison, and the tone which he gave it was of the best."⁵

Staid was the tone given to *Our Paper* by institutional editing. Its sixteen pages, nine by twelve inches large, were cleanly laid out with three columns of type on each page. Few illustrations were used during its first twenty years, and generally the paper had a dull, lackluster appearance. The front page usually featured a column of poetry, rarely written by an inmate, and a lengthy article, often extracted from another publication, with such titles as "A New Spanish Industry of Profits Is the Cultivation of Tomatoes" or "Meeting of Lieutenant Peary and the Relief Party." Similar articles followed on successive pages, enlightening readers on varied subjects such as the geography of Mount Ararat or the growth of the German army. The more newsworthy items, by journalistic standards, were usually buried on the inside pages. In its first issue, for instance, the paper reported on page 3 the death of Victor Hugo, who, for obvious reasons, was a popular author among inmates. The only deviation from the layout was when a figure of

national importance died. In 1885, for example, when General Grant died, *Our Paper* published, in addition to its regular edition, a four-page tribute to the former president.

From growing tomatoes in Spain to the funeral of an old general, conveying news from the outside to the inmates in a suitable manner was the paper's chief objective. It contained enough news, at least according to Chaplain Batt "to keep all that faithfully read it fairly well posted in regards to public affairs."⁶ Several pages of each issue, however, also contained news from around the reformatory. There were reports from various prison societies like the Young Men's Christian Association or the Young Men's Catholic Debating and Literary Society (YMCD & LS). These, as one can imagine, were written in the most boosterish style possible. "Our reliable friend Officer Russell being present, upon invitation from the President, ascended the platform, and delivered one of his forcible and striking addresses," reported, for example, the secretary of the YMCD & LS. "We feel safe in saying that Officer Russell's eloquent works are doing much good."⁷ Other news items from around the prison were found in "Local Notes." But even these items were penned in a literary style similar to the uplifting reports from the religious societies.

Our Paper got its name because the inmates who first worked on it wanted to emphasize the prison's separateness from the living world. Because it is a prison and not a small town, wrote one inmate, "there are interests and relations especial and peculiar to it and to ourselves as its members."⁸ An inmate writing a history of *Our Paper* in 1908 believed the paper lived up to its promise. "It has been not only a wise chronicler of outside news," he wrote, "but has also been an able reporter of inside news."⁹

A copy of the paper was given to each prisoner after dinner on Sunday, and he was free to mail it home after having read it. As with the *Summary*, there was considerable outside interest in the newspaper. It maintained a mailing list of three hundred judges, state officials, attenders of prison congresses, penologists, and others. Sometimes editions of more than two thousand copies were printed for mailing, especially when the state legislature was in session. The reformists in Massachusetts, like those in New York, loved displaying the work of their model inmates. In 1898, for instance, copies of *Our Paper* were sent to Congregational Church pastors around the country to mark the observance of Prison Sunday. The

committee in charge of promoting the event “thought that perhaps a veritable prison paper would be as practical a suggestion of the subject as they could make, and they thought that a paper printed in one of the prisons, and actually circulated among inmates and officers of that prison, would be more interesting,” said the editors by way of an explanatory article on page 1.¹⁰

The Charlestown prison administration was in agreement with the *Summary* at Elmira “that a prison paper should be intended for the prison population, and for them almost exclusively.”¹¹ *Our Paper* differed, however, in one significant way. Superintendent Tufts thought that penological articles, like those carried in the New York inmate newspaper, were not read by inmates, even those at Elmira. Instead, *Our Paper*, every three months, published a supplement devoted to penological news intended exclusively for the staff of the institution. Each supplement carried the following warning label: “This supplement is respectfully offered to the Reformatory officers. It is particularly requested that none be carried inside the prison, or put in the way of merely curious readers anywhere.”¹²

The inmates who produced *Our Paper*, like other inmate-journalists, eagerly exchanged copies of their publication for those of other prisons. But, unlike other inmate publications, *Our Paper* did not reprint material from other prison papers. It did not do so, explained the prison administration in one of the special supplements to the paper intended only for the eyes of other officials, because they were not so sure they wanted their wards to know about what goes on in other prisons. “Do we want our readers to know or learn of certain things that are happening in other prisons?” they asked. These, one supposes, might include improvements in prison conditions. News from other prisons, “it seems to us are not the best matters with which to occupy the minds of our population.” Rather, the officials wanted the men “to be interested in Christian associations, in farming, in churches, in home life....”¹³

Superintendent Tufts, who had watched over every detail of *Our Paper* since its conception, died in 1891. Scott assumed the duties of superintendent and relaxed his oversight of *Our Paper* slightly, especially in permitting the paper to devote more space to original articles by inmates. “Prisoners have written a great deal for the paper, especially reports of meetings, lectures, sermons, addresses, etc. They have furnished original papers, not a few, and also some fair poetry,” noted Chaplain Batt.¹⁴ The

reporting by the inmates, however, remained dull and colorless. Reports of meetings, for instance, read like embellished minutes. Speakers were always delivering “forcible, and striking addresses,” and sermons were always “inspirational.”

The inmates were not juveniles, but the paper treated them as if they were. It’s likely the paper bored them, even though it was one of the few sources, if not the only one, of news from the outside. The administration was not prepared to give *Our Paper* any semblance of free rein. While, over time, the superintendents permitted greater amount of inmate expression in the paper, they had continued to carefully control what was said. As late as 1916, for example, when the inmates were given a chance to express what they most wanted in their newspaper, the first thing they asked for was the removal of the administration’s muzzle. The time had come, wrote inmates in a special edition of *Our Paper* devoted to the “idea of a modern prison paper,” for their prison newspaper to enjoy “free speech and their own editorial staff.” Other prison newspapers, they continued, were allowed to manage their own affairs and edit their own material without constant interference from the prison administration, and it was time for *Our Paper* to be granted the same rights. “Free speech doesn’t mean the publicity privilege of knocking our administration board or government, or the absolute withdrawal of the administration’s censorship, but the like privileges granted to the inmates of other institutions,” wrote an inmate. “The privileges invariably have been the first steps of prison reform; steps of the progressive prison paper.”¹⁵

Apparently the administration accepted the idea. A subsequent issue announced that the newspaper would take on an inmate editor and possibly one or two associate editors. The next issue invited inmates’ contributions to the new, more open pages of *Our Paper*. However, warned the editors, “free access to *Our Paper*’s columns, does not include the license to insult or browbeat. Free speech, as long as it is respectful, is a welcome feature. Remember that *Our Paper* is not a social reform organ, except in bettering our own condition during incarceration.”¹⁶

Another model prison newspaper launched during this era by the prison reformists was the *Reflector*, published by inmates of the Indiana Reformatory in Jeffersonville, Indiana. Overlooking the Ohio River, the eleven-acre reformatory was contained within a thirty-three-foot-high wall. It had been originally constructed as a prison in 1821, but in the wake of the

1870 American Prison Congress it had been converted into a reformatory, with the more serious offenders sent to Michigan City. Like the other new reformatories, classrooms and workshops were built, and the unusually large chapel, with seats arranged in an elliptical shape, was made to double as a lecture hall. A nearby 230-acre farm was maintained by the prison, using inmate labor, to grow a large portion of the needed food. All of the reformists' beliefs were in practice in Indiana. The state, however, was not having as much success with the system as Elmira claimed to have.

Perhaps, as historian McKelvey suggested, it could have been that the original ideas stemming from the 1870 congress were becoming corrupted with their extensive use. "Faced with this widespread stampede to their ideas," wrote McKelvey, "veteran reformers began to rub their eyes and soon discovered that their prize reformatory device was degenerating into a shield for lax discipline."¹⁷ Indiana, for instance, classified all entering inmates in the top grade and demoted them only on account of an offense, rather than withholding the top grade as an incentive. Nonetheless, it remained a conviction at the Indiana reformatory that with proper care criminals could be reformed, noted Judge T. E. Ellison.

The State must educate her citizens, so that they may have the knowledge and power to do right. If one fails, when free to acquire such knowledge and power, should not the State, when he is a delinquent, compel him to surely acquire the ability to be a good citizen before he is given his freedom again. Such is now Indiana's policy at the reformatory, and will continue to be until she has received additional light.¹⁸

In 1897, the prison administration created the *Reflector*. There is evidence that another prison publication had existed in the reformatory a few years before. An article from a publication known as *Hot Drops*, said to be published by the inmates of Jeffersonville, was found by Michael W. Cooney, who wrote a history of the penal press in Indiana, in the *Plainfield Reformatory* of January 18, 1896. "There is a man in Jeffersonville Prison sent there for stealing while drunk who is a rare genius and adapted to better things.... He writes a paper called 'Hot Drops' which is circulated among the prisoners."¹⁹

For its first seven years, the *Reflector* was a six-page, four-column paper written, assembled, and printed weekly by the inmates. The newspaper, in tone and content, was much like the *Summary*, except that its production quality was vastly superior. According to its editors, the paper contained "non-sectarian communications solicited from all sources. Brevity and

purity of thought are essentialities in obtaining admission to the columns of the *Reflector*.²⁰

In 1903, the prison received a considerable appropriation from the state to bolster its trade school. The editorial control was given to a prison staff member and the paper became primarily a means of training printers. “With the new equipment installed, we were able to give employment eight hours a day to at least twenty-five boys, and to make of them practical printers,” said one of the prison officers.²¹ The content of the paper changed greatly, prompting the editors of *Our Paper* to comment that the *Reflector* “comes nearer to being a strictly religious paper than most others that we can think of.”²²

Its boring nature and lack of prison news invited much comment from other prison writers, who all kept a careful eye on each other’s work. The criticism prompted a reply published in the *Reflector* of September 20, 1907. “The inmates have nothing to do with the matter which goes into our columns,” wrote the nameless editor. “As its name indicated it is a mirror of the happenings in the outside world.”²³ The next month, the editor admitted also that “we could scarcely publish anything not already old to those owing to the well-known prison wireless system.”²⁴

In 1908, the *Reflector* became a daily, placed in each cell at 4 P.M. The weekly, containing a selection from each week’s daily editions, was continued for distribution among the inmates’ friends and family. The prison administration gave the new daily version of the newspaper three goals:

First, to interest, educate and keep the readers in touch as closely as possible in its limited space, with the outside world.

Second, to run a serial story, published a portion each day, the story to be selected from high class fiction or history with a view to occupying the mind of the reader, thus breaking in a degree the monotony of institutional life.

Third, to give employment to the inmates who were assigned to the department with a view of making of them practical printers.²⁵

Like the *Summary* upon which it was modeled, the *Reflector* contained “clean readable matter which would be of lasting benefit to those for whom it was printed.” The chief aim was to provide the inmates only with matters that would impress upon them the virtue of “leading a clean, moral and upright life.” Along with the library, the newspaper was considered by the

staff of the Indiana Reformatory as “the foundation for real work along lines of reformation.” By 1909, administrators reported that the use of the seven-thousand-volume library had quadrupled, and books were no longer being disfigured with “smutty pictures.” “Such are the results of a systematic effort on the part of the management to interest and instruct the inmates of the reformatory, through the medium of a clean newspaper and a modern up-to-date library.”²⁶ The daily continued until 1915 when it ceased publication for no stated reason. It resumed in 1922 and was published continuously until the early 1970s, when it was abolished by prison officials as being too expensive.

As the 1900s opened, nearly all of the new reformatories included a prison newspaper among their penological inventions. *Our Paper* and the *Monthly Record* in Connecticut, the *Reformatory Record* in Pennsylvania, the *Better Citizen* in New Jersey, and the *Ohio Penitentiary News* in Ohio were all begun following Elmira’s success with the *Summary*. Like the Elmira paper they were all closely supervised and were not intended to be organs of their inmate populations. Rather, they were envisioned by the officials as part of an overall plan of corrections. The papers were exactly what Chandler had described in his speech at the 1870 American Prison Congress.

Not surprisingly, chaplains were playing a significant role in shaping the newspapers, as they were also doing with the prison libraries at the time. In fact, at the 1895 congress chaplains gathered for a separate meeting in the Church of Unity lecture room where they proposed ten principles in a jointly produced report titled “Model Prison Paper.” First, a model prison paper should promote righteousness, the Ten Commandments, and other religious injunctions. “It should be clean from beginning to end. It should be courteous and fair and, like the bread of the prison kitchen, it should be thoroughly wholesome.” Second, it ought to be as much as possible the work of prisoners. Third, the newspaper should be designed to the specific conditions and inmates of its prison. Fourth, it should be illustrated. Fifth, it should have a paid circulation. “A large prison should naturally have, we think, enough friends outside, including parents of prisoners, who might feel disposed to pay for it, to maintain a genuine newspaper circulation.” Sixth, a model paper should do more than reprint selected items from outside publications. Seventh, it should present and discuss the news of the day. “A prisoner who reads the prison paper very long should find himself,

when he goes out, very well posted upon public matters. He should not only know something about events of large significance and of general interest that have happened, but also he should know the nature and the bearing of them.” Eighth, the paper should have a personality that represents the spirit of the prison. “The same spirit, reforming, vitalizing, educating, sympathetic, that is breathing all through the prison, should especially breathe through the prison paper.” Ninth, the paper should be nonpartisan and impartial between religious denominations. Tenth, and reflecting the **Utopian** streak present in the reformists movement, “as respects the purity of its purpose and the thoroughness of its work, a prison paper should be one of the best papers in the world.”²⁷

Thirty wardens were polled in 1909 by Isabel Barrows about the influence of the newspapers on the inmates. Without exception, the wardens expressed themselves in favor of the publications. The wardens reported an increase in the use of libraries and that the newspapers helped with discipline and kept men in better touch with the outside world, making their reentry more likely to succeed. “In surveying then this field of industrial and mental work for men in prisons and reformatories, it may be said that it is the rule in American institutions of the best class to have a paper edited and printed by the inmates,” wrote Barrows. “In prisons as well as in reformatories they have a good moral influence and are an inspiration to better living.”²⁸

The first group of prison newspapers were thus a creation of the reformist spirit that invaded the legislatures and prisons of the United States following the euphoric birth of a professional cadre of prison administrators. Considering this, it is not surprising that the publications lacked spark, originality, and frankness. Reading them, one would think that prison life was often pleasant, invigorating, and improving; an image Brockway, Tufts, and other wardens wanted to convey. Prison life, of course, was not pleasant, invigorating, and especially not improving. There were, however, some prison newspapers that were not begun or controlled by prison officials. In such cases, the portrait of prison life they presented was more real and animated.

Chapter 5

The *Prison Mirror*

They say the torture's gone, the dawn's arisen, Mercy, to angered hearts a suitor
strange, Has begged her own; yet this they cannot change, I have been free, and I am
here in prison.

— John Carter, columnist for the *Prison Mirror*, taken from his 1911 volume of poetry about life in the Minnesota prison

“Whisky spoiled the whole plan,” said Cole Younger years after the Northfield, Minnesota, bank robbery ended his career as a bandit and began his new one as a prison librarian and founder of the first prison newspaper west of the Mississippi. The botched robbery in September of 1876 was supposed to be the gang’s last. Cole Younger, his two brothers, and the Jesse James Gang had picked a bank far from their native Missouri, which had harbored them since the end of the Civil War. Life for ex-Confederate guerrillas was becoming increasingly difficult, and they decided to make one more unauthorized withdrawal from a bank before taking up residence in another country. Three of them had gone ahead of the others, polishing off a quart of whisky before getting into town. “The blunder,” recalled Cole Younger, “was that when these three saw us coming, instead of waiting for us to get up with them they slammed right on into the bank regardless, leaving the door open in their excitement.” Escaping under a barrage of gunfire, the wounded gang was chased across the state. Near the Iowa border the three Youngers were captured, while the James Brothers escaped back to Missouri.¹

In November, the Youngers, shackled and handcuffed, were brought before Judge Lord in Faribault, Minnesota. The three pleaded guilty, thereby escaping a jury trial and the death penalty. “I have no words of comfort for you or desire to reproach you or deride you,” said the judge. “While the law

leaves you life, all its pleasures, all its hopes, all its joys are gone from you, and all that is left is the empty shell.”² The three were sentenced to life at hard labor in the state prison. “When the iron doors shut behind us at the Stillwater prison,” said Cole Younger, “we all submitted to the prison discipline with the same unquestioning obedience that I had exacted during my military service.”³

The state prison, located in Stillwater, about fifty miles from the state capital, had been constructed in the 1850s. The cells were damp, musty, and dirty. Even the bedding was wet, reported the *St Paul Dispatch*. It was a traditional prison, not one influenced by the reformists. The prisoners were garbed in woolen pants, jacket, and skullcap, all striped in black and white. There were a pair of dungeon cells for those who misbehaved. When the Youngers arrived, about three hundred inmates, including several female inmates, were housed in the prison.

Cole was first put to work making washtubs. Many prisoners, like Younger, were hired out to private firms who held contracts to lease prison labor. The one that employed Cole Younger, obtained nine to eleven hours of labor each day from inmates making tubs, buckets, and barrels for sale. Cole Younger was considered so desperate that a special guard was assigned to him during his first years in prison.⁴ In time, however, the Youngers’ good behavior won the trust of the officials. Cole Younger was reassigned to the prison library, his brother Jim Younger became the postmaster of the penitentiary, and his other brother became a clerk.

After nearly ten years in the Stillwater prison, Cole was approached by Lew P. Shoonmaker, another inmate, with the idea of starting a newspaper inside the penitentiary. Shoonmaker had been working on the plan for several months, but had been, at first, rebuffed by the administration. “When the publication of a prison paper was first proposed to me it did not meet with my approval,” recalled Warden Halvur Stordock. “It was a new thing in prison to publish a paper.”⁵ Stordock had been appointed in early 1887, replacing John Reed, who was dismissed because of alleged mismanagement of prison funds. A farmer who had not had any previous experience at running a prison, Stordock was hesitant to approve anything new or controversial like a newspaper for the inmates. After a few months, however, he relented, and Shoonmaker was granted permission to go ahead with his plans.

The plan was remarkable and unlike that of any other prison newspaper in the nation. The newspaper would be funded and created *solely* by inmates. This was not to be a creature of the reformists, like the influential *Summary of Elmira*. In fact, once the newspaper began publishing, it criticized Brockway's newspaper and took issue with the penologists who would restrict inmates' choice of reading. "It is the height of nonsense to exclude any paper from a prison that has an unrestricted circulation outside of prison walls," said the *Mirror* editors in 1888, rebutting the benevolent censorship popular among reformists such as Brockway, Barrows, and Wines.

To launch the *Mirror*, Shoonmaker drew up a founding agreement (Figure 5.1) and began soliciting funds from other inmates. One of them recalled years later, how one Sunday afternoon Shoonmaker came to his cell door asking for money. "I am going to start a little newspaper here in prison, to be conducted entirely by the inmates," he said, "and I am around talking the matter up."⁶ His efforts paid off. Cole Younger and his two brothers joined in the venture by contributing \$50, one-fourth of the needed capital. A dozen other inmates, including Shoonmaker, came up with the remainder.

Considering that inmates earned thirty to forty-five cents a day as contract laborers, the capital these inmates contributed was a major commitment on their part. Shoonmaker made each of the contributors shareholders in the newspaper, and according to the agreement he drew up, each would be repaid with 3 percent interest a month. Once they were reimbursed, the paper would become the property of the prison library, where Cole Younger worked, and the profits would be used to purchase books and periodicals. At the time, the library contained few volumes, even fewer of interest to inmates. Among the works that an inmate was permitted to read on long Minnesota winter nights, under the flickering light of a kerosene lamp, were, for instance, Elliott's *Sermons*, Irving's *Washington*, and a novel called *The Jealous Husband*.⁷

Agreement of the Shareholders of the *Prison Mirror*

H. G. Stordock, Warden

We, the undersigned, do hereby voluntarily loan to the "trust fund" for the purpose of starting a prison paper, under the management of L. P. Schoonmaker, the following sums opposing our respective names, and sums to be replaced to our several credits with interest thereon at the rate of three percent per month from the first earnings of said paper, and when the full amount of said loan, with due interest thereon, is so refunded and paid to our private accounts in prison office, our claims upon the stock, materials, and shares of said paper become the property of the prison library, and a part and parcel thereof; and the net profits of said paper shall be devoted exclusively to the prison library, in the purchase of such books and periodicals as the warden may select; and we hereby pray that you will accept this, and consider the same an order to pay the said respective sums opposite our names to the treasurer of said paper, Mr. George P. Dodd, and charge the same to our several accounts.

Signed:

Lew P. Schoonmaker.....	\$20.00
Coleman Younger.....	\$20.00
James Younger.....	\$20.00
Robert Younger.....	\$10.00
John Gilbert.....	\$10.00
Frank. P. Landers.....	\$10.00
Lloyd Porter.....	\$10.00
Walter E. Nutt.....	\$10.00
William Riley.....	\$10.00
George Anderson.....	\$10.00
William Hohl	\$10.00
James Craig	\$10.00
James Irwin	\$10.00
Jacob Bird	\$10.00
Charles Hickling	\$10.00

Figure 5.1 The founding agreement of the *Prison Mirror*, 1887.



The *Prison Mirror*, which in 1997 was still being published at the Minnesota State Prison in Stillwater, is the oldest continuously published prison newspaper in the United States. It was founded by a group of inmates, including the Younger Brothers of the Jesse James Gang, in 1887.

On August 10, 1887, the first issue of the *Prison Mirror* appeared. Four pages long, fourteen by seventeen inches, the issue was mostly devoted to introducing itself to its readers.

In thus, sending for to the world this humbler little sheet, we trust and pray that it is destined to become the corner stone of the great pedestal whereon shall stand the living statue of truth, bearing aloft, the flaming torch of mercy, justice, and reason; and from the sands of this tiny booklet there maybe gathered many brilliant gems of truth to forever decorate the sovereign heads of honor, manhood and right.

It was obvious, as his enthusiasm bubbled through the text of the first issue, that Shoonmaker held out great hope for his new weekly. "The introduction of the printing press into the great penal institutions of our land," he wrote, "is the first important step taken toward solving the great problem of true prison reform." Shoonmaker, who had appointed himself editor and Cole assistant editor or printer's devil,^{*} published on the front page the entire text of the shareholders' agreement to show the *Mirror*'s origins and a letter from the warden to prove the newspaper had his consent. The paper's management though, promised Shoonmaker, "will be without official interference, and solely in charge of the managing editor."⁸ The only other news contained in the premier issue were two items, one about a talk given at the prison; the other, concerning letters written between the warden and a citizen on the issue of flogging.

The *Mirror* was an immediate success. Copies were sold by newsboys in Stillwater, and subscriptions poured in from around the country. The merchants who had advertised in the first issue, mostly grocers and clothing stores, bought advertisements in succeeding issues. Within six months the *Mirror* paid back, with due interest, the money owed its investors and “contributed a neat sum to the library fund.” In February 1888, pursuant to its founding agreement, the paper became the property of the prison library. Shoonmaker was no longer in prison to savor his triumph. Before the third issue appeared he had been pardoned, and W. F. Mirick, an inmate who had not been one of the original founders, became editor.

Newspapers around the country also took note of the Minnesota inmates’ journalistic endeavor. On the eve of the inaugural issue, the *Chicago Herald* announced to its readers “Undeterred by the fate of the newspaper which was started sometime ago in the Wisconsin penitentiary, the convicts at Stillwater, Minn, are about to begin the publication of a weekly journal.”

If the Minnesota project is to succeed, it must have a little life in it, and instead of praising the warden, guards and keepers, it must show them in their hideous deformity. A journal published by jail-birds should be candid, sincere, bold and even defiant. There should be a flavor of mush and molasses and lock and key about it.... The reader should hear, or at least he should imagine that he hears, the clank of a ball and chain or the rude swoop of a manacled fist.⁹

The *Mirror* reprinted portions of the *Chicago Herald*’s editorial in one of its first issues, promising to abide by it, in a remarkable tribute to freedom. No other existing prison newspaper of that era would have been permitted to suggest that wardens and guards could be anything other than benevolent. On the other hand, there were newspapers, especially several in Minnesota, that were antagonistic to the *Mirror*. Some, like the *Taylors Falls Journal*, dismissed it as a ploy by the warden to garner publicity. As a result, the *Mirror* was forced to continually point out, in its early issues, that it “was not established, nor is it to be run, for the laudation of the present prison administration.” Rather, as Shoonmaker’s successor noted, the “*Prison Mirror* is the convict’s paper.... We shall speak the truth whatever we conceive it to be, and continue to speak as long as we are accorded the privilege of publishing this paper.”¹⁰

Nonetheless the charges were not easily put aside. George Lautenschlager, for instance, whose ten-year murder sentence was commuted, told the *St Paul Dispatch* upon his release that the *Mirror* “is under the immediate

supervision of the warden, and not a line goes in that he does not but first read. It is my impression, and that of the prisoners, that the paper is simply run in the interest of Stordock.”¹¹ Not true, replied Mirick, who listed Lautenschlager’s accusation and his rebuttal on page 2. “No citizen, or official of this prison, has any supervision, or in any manner scrutinizes, or knows what the contents of the *Mirror* are to be until it is printed,” he wrote. When he had taken proofs to the warden, he continued, “he had returned them without even a glance.”¹²

Reading the *Mirror* it was obvious that those who accused the editors of being under Stordock’s control were incorrect. The paper’s independence was evident from the number of articles critical of prison life which it ran. “The *Mirror* belongs to the prison library; it is the convict’s paper, and it will do all in its power to lighten the darkness of our prison cells,” said Mirick.¹³ But it was also clear that the paper favored Stordock. It was a logical friendship considering it was he who had made the publication of the paper possible. “The successful launching could not have been accomplished without the sanction and co-operation of Warden S.,” noted the *Mirror*.¹⁴ Its favoritism toward Stordock, however, brought about the paper’s first, and nearly fatal, crisis.

In the fall of its first year, the *Mirror* joined the ongoing fray between Warden Stordock and ex-Warden Reed, who was being investigated for his alleged mismanagement. Stordock and new prison inspectors (a governing board) had created the conflict by declaring they had discovered “irregularities and immoralities” under Reed.¹⁵ The governor appointed a committee to study the accusations. Before they concluded their work, many charges and countercharges were flung from the two quarters. Unflattering items culled from outside newspapers about Reed’s tenure as warden found their way into the *Mirror*. This brought down the wrath of one of the state’s most powerful newspapers, the *Minneapolis Tribune*. In a Sunday editorial, the *Tribune* launched its attack:

A careful examination of the recent issues of the *Prison Mirror*, compels the frank opinion that it ought to be summarily suppressed or else reformed in all its departments.

Not only had the *Mirror* published “the most offensive and adverse comments upon ex-warden Reed,” explained Minneapolis’s leading newspaper, but “it prints current criminal news, as, for example, the Mary Sylvester and Maud Compson assaults, and is allowed to comment freely

and in shockingly bad taste upon inside prison matters.” The *Minneapolis Tribune* said that the *Mirror*’s articles imply that convicts are as good, if not better, than people outside of prison. All of this, noted the *Tribune*, is in marked contrast to the *Summary*, “a perfect model of high toned, interesting and well-edited little weekly journal.” Simply put, “men in the penitentiary are not as men at liberty. Among the other things denied them should certainly be the privilege of running a newspaper without restriction or responsible control.”¹⁶ Unmentioned by the *Tribune* was the fact that the *Mirror* had, the week before, poked fun at the Minneapolis paper for an editorial suggesting that the only reason an attractive woman married Grover Cleveland was “to obtain the position of mistress of the White House.”¹⁷

Whatever the true reason, the *Mirror* had a life-threatening problem on its hands - the state’s major newspaper was advocating that the state suppress it. (Ironically, eighty years later, the *Tribune* hired one of the *Mirrors* editors upon his release from prison.) While Stordock and other officials considered the *Tribune*’s advice, a newspaper across the river came to the *Mirrors* defense. “Don’t Do It” was the headline of a leading editorial in the *St Paul Daily Globe*.

It is said the further publication of the *Prison Mirror* is to be suppressed ... because a paragraph slipped into the columns of a recent issue alluding to the Reed-Stordock squabble ... *[Mirror]* has been the means of furnishing the convicts with a great deal of reading matter that they would not otherwise have, and has in many ways been a source of light and comfort to lives, which, God knows, are cheerless enough at best. It is in the interest of humanity that the *Globe* appeals to the authorities of the

Stillwater prison not to suppress the publication of this little newspaper.¹⁸

The authorities restrained themselves. But the storm, which the *Mirror* had unleashed, forced the inmate-editor to at least admit that the Reed material they published “may not have been exactly suitable for the columns of the *Mirror*.” But he offered no apology and warned that if the paper was muzzled it would mean its end. “When it is made the organ of any official ...when the right to speak the truth is denied it,” wrote Mirick, “then indeed has its death-knell been sounded.”¹⁹

The furor died. “Now that the troubles connected with the prison have ceased,” noted the *Mirror* in 1888, the paper “is to be allowed to pursue the even tenor of its way.”²⁰ Financially the paper had concluded its first six months with cash in the bank and by the end of its first year had contributed \$150 to the library. It had three hundred inmate and four hundred outside

subscribers. However, the paper stood to lose much of its financial support. “Owing to the expiration of contract labor and the consequent cessation of our good-time money, no inmate can subscribe unless he is fortunate enough to have funds of his own, which is rarely the case; hence the source of nearly one-half of our present income will be cut off.”²¹

In the end, following the 1888 fight with the *Tribune*, the *Mirror* began to lose some of its initial independence and spark. The change may not have been because of its run-in with the *Tribune*. More likely it was caused by the departure of the inmates who had put together the original *Mirror*. By 1890 only five of the original founders remained in the prison, and Mirick, who had succeeded Shoonmaker as editor, had won his freedom. A convicted murderer, Mirick was pardoned after the prosecutor and judge of his 1885 trial pushed for his release.

In 1901, the two Youngers were paroled (Bob had died in prison), and none of the principal creators of the *Mirror* were left in the penitentiary. Cole Younger, however, had never played as large a role in the newspaper as that popularly ascribed to him. Aside from helping get it started, he rarely contributed much time to the paper. In fact, over his years in prison only two articles appeared with his byline, and only a few others are attributed to him. In addition, when outside newspapers referred to the *Mirror* as Cole Younger’s newspaper, editors felt called upon, perhaps by Cole himself, to explain that he had never been the editor of the weekly. Whatever his degree of involvement with the newspaper, it probably stemmed more from his interest in supporting the prison library, which he nurtured, than from any great interest in prison journalism.

By the time the *Mirror* celebrated its twenty-fifth anniversary, a decade after the Youngers’ departure, it was no longer the newspaper that Shoonmaker and his fellow inmates created. On the other hand, it had not degenerated into a dull newspaper like the *Summary* at Elmira, New York. What it lost was a critical eye and independence toward affairs governing the prison, or it was prevented from writing about them frankly. After 1894, it had become the warden’s habit to review proofs of the newspaper before it was printed. On the other hand, the now eight-page weekly covered the affairs of the nation and state with vigor and color, better, in fact, than many small city newspapers. And, like many of the newspapers of the upper Midwest in the early 1900s, the *Prison Mirror* did so from a progressive, prolabor and prosuffrage viewpoint.

The Lawrence strike, for instance, was covered extensively in the *Mirror*. The strike in distant Massachusetts in the winter of 1912 was an epic confrontation involving new and old immigrants, a conservative and a radical labor union, mill owners and politicians. The strike, said a *Mirror* editorial, was worthy of coverage because it opened the eyes of the American people “to the abominable conditions which surround the workers, and under which they are forced to struggle for a bare existence.”²²

“As long as the cost of living keeps on increasing, so long will there be strikes,” promised *Mirror* columnist Nil Desperandum (the inmates then used pen names).²³ The cause of the unrest, claimed another inmate-writer, was that “while the whole country has been growing wealthier, the laboring classes, who undoubtedly have caused the increase of wealth, have not received anywhere near the proper share of the increase and they have just begun to find out.”²⁴ Not only did the laboring class have an ally in this northern representative of the penal press, which had a healthy circulation outside of the prison, but so did the movement for women’s suffrage, child labor laws, and other Progressive causes. The *Mirror* of the early 1900s never hesitated to defend a dissenter. When, for example, J. A. Wayland, publisher of the socialist *Appeal to Reason* committed suicide, the *Mirror* noted that “many editors think they see the workings of Divine retribution” in his manner of death. “What rot!” it retorted. “Wayland suffered only the common fate of those who labor too industriously in the cause of humanity.”²⁵ Although the *Mirror* defended liberal causes and their crusaders, it now virtually ignored its own backyard. It often published stories on new parole laws in another state, the abolition of stripes in another penitentiary, or a new jury law in a nearby state. But conspicuous by their absence were hard news stories about the Minnesota prison.

The advent of the Great War brought an end to the *Mirror*’s progressiveness. Like most of the population, once the antiwar forces had been suppressed, the editors of the *Mirror* blindly supported the American entry into the European conflict. Just a few years before it wasn’t unusual to find an inmate-editor suggesting that the government could get along without building another battleship to emulate the arms race in Europe. Through the war years the *Mirror* became increasingly institutional. As it had once lost its independence from prison authorities, it now lost its vitality. Articles titled “Self-Discipline is a Valuable Asset” or “Christianity Very Highly

Considered" became regular front-page fare. "Its columns are replete with inspiring sentiment," wrote "Bluebird," the new *Mirror* editor.²⁶

But before it lost the last of its original qualities, the *Mirror* had showed that left to themselves the inmates could produce a genuine, independent, and useful inmate newspaper. The *Mirror*, in its early years, was a far truer reflection of the inmates' interests and needs than was the *Summary* or any of the papers it inspired. Comparing the *Mirror* to modern prison newspapers, it may not seem so exceptional. There were none of the hard-hitting exposés or rebellious articles that are found in Louisiana's *Angolite*, for instance. But then there were no courts, or inmate organizations for that matter, willing to back up these early prison journalists. Prisons in the 1880s were fiefdoms of their wardens. Their decisions in regard to the inmates were never reviewed by anyone, especially not the courts. If the legislature took an interest, it was certainly not on behalf of the inmates. The fact that the *Mirror*, even for a short period, kept its unique character under those conditions made it an exceptional newspaper. The *Mirror*, however, was not the only instance in the early days of prison journalism where inmates rather than reformists started a newspaper.

*Printer's Devil was a term used to describe the printer's errand boy, specifically the one who took the printed sheets off the press. Some remarked, said the editors of the *Mirror*, that their newspaper was the only one in the state where the devil was not compelled to do that job. "Cole, with a merry twinkle in his eyes, replied, 'That's true, and it is also the only office in the state where the editor can't go out and get drunk. " (Reported in the Stillwater Daily Gazette and reprinted the *Prison Mirror*, Vol. 1, No. 2, August 17, 1887, 2.)

Chapter 6

The Mentor

In the attempt to express our thoughts by means of a prison paper, we are like a colony whose first thought is, here's pen, ink, and paper. Let us build unto ourselves a house of letters; a house that no wind nor storm can down ... but will acknowledge that it takes more than a suit of gray to crush all the manhood out of us.

—The *Mentor*, February 1902

In October 1900, as other inmates settled into their cells for the night at the state prison in Charlestown, Massachusetts, Emil Kemp would sit on the edge of his bunk before a small table on which rested a cardboard pad with a nine-by-three-inch steel plate at its center. The plate was no ordinary piece of steel. It had been milled so that it had thousands of tiny points, visible only with a magnifying glass, like a miniature of the carpet of nails on which a fakir might stroll. To begin his work, Kemp would lay a piece of specially prepared waxed paper over the plate and lock it in place with a hinged tin frame. Then, taking up a piece of agate, sharpened like the end of pencil, Kemp would lean over the table and, in the dim light of his cell, begin his work. Like a monk of the Middle Ages, Kemp would transcribe to the waxed paper words from a manuscript that lay before him. As he wrote, the pressure of the stylus against the waxed paper on the prickly steel surface would leave tiny holes along its path. Letter by letter, word by word, sentence by sentence, Kemp would prepare the stencil through which the ink would pass when later that month he and his friend J.J.C.* would print the premier issue of the *Mentor*, one of the most remarkable of the nineteenth-century inmate-launched publications.

Conditions at Charlestown were much like those in the damp, musty Minnesota prison where inmates had created the *Prison Mirror* some thirteen years earlier. Standing almost in the shadow of Bunker Hill, the

Massachusetts State Prison, built in 1804, was one of the oldest and most archaic in the country.

THE PIONEER

VOLUME
XII

ESTABLISHED 1860
ISSUED MONTHLY

NUMBER
VI

for
APRIL



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Almanac

Working at night in his cell, the inmate who produced this table of contents for the April 1912 *Mentor* had to handcut each page using a waxed paper stencil.

Earlier in fall of 1900, on a Saturday afternoon while inmates were enjoying yard privileges beneath the tall stone perimeter walls, Kemp had approached J.J.C, and asked him to help get out a prison newspaper. “I was interested at once,” recalled J.J.C, twenty-five years later, “for I had written papers that were read at the weekly school teacher’s meetings at the prison, also had written some poetry that I felt was just about the proper thing, but looking back now I know said poetry must have been some very crude articles.”¹

The pair put together a sixteen-page sample issue and submitted it to the deputy warden for approval. The warden accepted the idea. Other short-lived attempts had apparently been made before to launch a prison newspaper at Charlestown, but no record of those exists today. J.J.C, proposed this new attempt be called the *Reflector*, but both he and the warden preferred Kemp’s name, the *Mentor*. Kemp was appointed editor-publisher and J.J.C, was given the title local editor.

Kemp worked on the stencils all of October, averaging two pages a night. “One page completed,” wrote an inmate describing the process, “another takes its place to receive the burning words of impassioned poet and prison-bound penologist, the deep thoughts of grey-coated philosopher.”²

Moreover, many of the pages had ornate illustrations to accompany the text, and the first letter of each story was usually embellished with a complicated design. The work was striking in appearance and difficult in production. Errors occurred. Sometimes inmate-editors fixed them by filling the letters already cut with wax and stenciling again over the same surface. But it was delicate procedure that often resulted in a torn stencil. So frequently they had to redo several hours of work entirely.

By the end of the month, Kemp and J.J.C, were ready to print their first effort. Fifty inmates had donated funds for the purchase of a mimeograph machine. But, unlike the *Prison Mirror*, the *Mentor* was not being launched as a commercial venture. The inmate-editors stretched the first wax stencil on a frame attached by way of a hinge to a board with blotter paper. They laid a sheet of white paper on the blotter, lowered the frame, and ran an inked hand roller carefully and evenly over the stencil. When the frame was raised, Kemp and J.J.C, stared at the first page of their nascent paper.

It seems easy enough, when you read it here, but care is requisite if satisfactory results are expected. If the ink is too stiff, or too much pressure is put on the roller, the stencil will tear. A steady, even pressure on the roller and a proper supply of ink are necessary. To protect the stencil during the printing, a sheet of very thin paper, somewhat resembling Japanese napkin paper, is placed over the face of the stencil. The hand-roller passes over this paper, which is sufficiently porous to permit the passage of ink through it.³

They had to repeat this process endlessly, as it permitted the printing of only a single page at a time. The first issue of the *Mentor* was fifty-three pages long, and fifty copies were printed, requiring 2,650 passes through the hand press. Within six months the circulation rose to 130 copies, causing Kemp to make, on average, 6,500 impressions to produce a single edition. The logistics of producing each issue were tremendous, as each page had to be dried before the reverse side could be printed. Even before being glued, stitched together, and covered, the *Mentor* was an incredible product of painstaking hand work. “The reason for using this process,” explained Kemp a few years later, “is partly to carry out the idea of the hand-written periodicals from which the *Mentor* was evolved, and for the artistic sense which seeks and finds its expression in the processes intimately connected with handicraft.”⁴

In November, the first issue of the *Mentor* appeared. “The movement to organize, and permanently establish in this prison, a literary publication has been a difficult one; an exciting one,” admitted Kemp. “More than one, more than one hundred times, failure, in all its sickening ugliness, has stared at us with bold defiance.”⁵ It contained a four-page article on whether education benefits inmates, another on severe legal penalties, a three-page short story, reports on prison sporting teams (complete with box scores), bits of inmate humor, and a solicitation for articles from inmates, among other items. Its first editorial was devoted to smuggling of contraband into the prison. “In bringing this matter to notice,” wrote Kemp of J.J.C., “it is not our intention to cater to the administration. Such a course would not meet the views of this publication.”⁶

Fifteen inmates contributed articles for the first issue. With each subsequent issue the number of participating inmates grew so that by April of 1901, thirty-five inmates had articles in that month’s edition of the *Mentor*. Circulation also grew so that by the following year it reached two hundred. Sixteen copies went to the administration, the governor, and the prison commission. A dozen copies were mailed to prisons with whom the

inmates exchanged prison publications. The remainder were circulated through the prison on a lending basis. Each inmate was allowed to have a copy for two days, except for those whose work appeared in the issue. They were given a copy in return for their contribution and were permitted to mail it outside the prison.

What attracted the inmates to the *Mentor* was that aside from its beautiful design, it had a good deal of worthwhile reading. From the start it used many of its painstakingly inscribed pages to describe prison life to its outside readers. One article, for instance, was a poignant series of reflections on being a “lifer,” probably written by Kemp, who was serving a life term. He wrote that at first the lifer believes what his friends tell him, that he will be released someday. But he “finds, at last, that he has been living in a fool’s paradise, the reaction sets in; his mind and brain become affected and, if not an exceptionally strong man mentally and physically-his life is a short one; long years of confinement had sapped his strength, lack of nourishing food and fresh air make him an easy prey to disease and then comes the pine box and another grave in potter’s field, —or Bridgewater [the state’s mental institution].”⁷

As one would expect for the era, the *Mentor* was censored. “Each copy is submitted, in proof, to the Deputy Warden, in order that he may be sure nothing goes out that he can not approve, and to assure us that, after all is bound, a point which merits censure will not cause a delay in the issue,” wrote one of the inmate editors.⁸

By 1902, the inmates proclaimed the permanence of the *Mentor*. “The matter is no longer an experiment, but to day a pronounced and successful feature of the new prison discipline,” said the January editorial. Like other prison newspapers, the inmate-editor held high hopes for it.

It is somewhat difficult to accurately gauge the influence of the prison paper in the outside world.... Nevertheless there are not lacking certain and sufficient evidences to justify the belief that the cause of the prisoner has been materially strengthened in many quarters since the advent of the prison paper.⁹

But the *Mentor* was especially critical of its fellow prison publications. Most of them, like the *Summary*, simply reprinted articles from outside newspapers “adding to them one or two hastily written articles by home contributors,” wrote Kemp. “Not only are they utterly worthless as disseminators of penological conduct and affairs, but they are a mill-stone around the necks of those few journals now endeavoring to boost this branch

of penology to its proper attitude.” The *Prison Mirror*, the *Star of Hope* (at Sing Sing), and a few others gained Kemp’s approval. Most, he said, were “whining, wheedling-I-want-a-pardon-papers.” He said that prison newspapers like that would do little good to improve the lot of the prisoner. “It is all tommy-rot to talk about the wonderful change there has been in the attitude of people toward the prison,” he wrote. Let one inmate try to make his home within twenty miles of the prison, assured Kemp, and he will quickly witness this “new attitude.” But an active prison press, united and writing truthfully about prison life can change all that. But, “Spare us! Spare us! From the Chaplain scissor edited prison paper,” begged Kemp, “even the creamy lather of tonsorial soap objects to them.”¹⁰

The Mentor’s staff, which grew to twenty-two within a year, wanted to display the best of prison talents to readers.

Though it may come in the nature of a surprise to many, we say, here that the *Mentor* is already a potent factor for the best interest of the prisoner in the outside world. We mean to make it a still greater agency for good. If thoughtful men in the outside world are fairly compelled to ask themselves the question: “What manner of men are these who can produce a paper of this standard of merit?”¹¹

Penological articles, like those that appeared in the *Summary* were expressly forbidden. “Few prisoners possess the necessary training and education to properly and judicially discuss such questions,” said the editors.¹² Nor were stories of crime to appear in its pages. Aside from material like poignant stories about life in prison, the bulk of the copy comprised articles on travel, adventure, miniature biographies of famous persons, fiction, and a considerable amount of history. There was a reason why much of it read like school essays. For, aside from its most remarkable physical attributes, the *Mentor* distinguished itself in the history of prison journalism through its efforts to educate inmates.

From its inception, the *Mentor* saw among its primary roles the education of inmates. The first issue included articles on penmanship and mathematics and promised more similar material. “The especial feature that has differentiated the magazine from all other prison publications,” wrote an inmate in a retrospective issue, “is its devotion to educational interests.”¹³ Within two years of its founding, the *Mentor* began the nation’s only correspondence school for the inmates taught and managed entirely by inmates. It offered courses in penmanship, grammar, arithmetic, spelling,

rhetoric, bookkeeping, stenography, music, French, Spanish, algebra, and geometry.

Inmates applied to take courses from the school through interviews with the inmates who operated it. Once accepted, an inmate would find a lesson folder, writing paper, and pencils in his cell. On Saturday mornings, students were to leave their completed lessons on the chair in their cells. While they were enjoying yard privileges, the folders were collected and redistributed among the inmates who taught the courses. On Monday, when the inmates returned from shop, they would find their corrected lessons along with new ones for the week on the chair of their cell.

Every week the inmates' progress was charted and monthly reports were filed with the school. The students were not permitted to find out who their teachers were. Each lesson folder bore only the number of the student's teacher. Not only were they anonymous, but the teachers did their work on their own time.

The work of the teachers in the school is done outside the regular working hours of the institution; - that is, the teachers are not exempt from ordinary routine; they work in the various shops and departments during the day precisely as do the other men. When the prescribed work of the day has been done and they are back in their rooms for the night; - then begins their work in connection with the school; so that the work of the school is carried on without necessitating the taking of men from the productive industries of the prison.¹⁴

As the school grew, textbooks were obtained and exams were regularly administered. It was nonetheless a great travail. "The very nature of the undertaking was sufficient in itself to call for the exercise of the greatest patience, tact and industry," explained the *Mentor*. "From the very first it was apparent that this was pioneer work; into this chosen field no one had previously entered."¹⁵ The school was a great success among the inmates, many of whom hoped to get a marketable skill before being freed.

In 1904, the *Mentor* and its correspondence school were selected to form part of the Massachusetts Educational Exhibit in the Palace of Education at the St. Louis World Fair. The May issue featured the exposition's flag on the cover and lengthy explanations of the *Mentors* history and correspondence school. An inmate addressing those who might read the specially prepared issue displayed at the fair wrote "Far too many there are who believe that once in prison, a man is hopelessly and forever lost, - that never again can he become a useful and honorable member of society." The *Mentor* and the work of its school, he wrote, should "controvert" those views.¹⁶

The prison administrators certainly were swayed by the work of the school, as were fair officials who awarded the inmates a medal. An office was set aside at the prison for the school, and for another four years it continued its work. In 1908, however, a fire swept through the portion of the prison that housed the *Mentor*'s office, and all the lesson sheets and records of the school were destroyed. "Only a blue pencil, which was found in the debris, remained," wrote an inmate, "but that was sufficient to serve as the nucleus for a new plant."¹⁷ That would be sufficient for the paper perhaps, but not for the school, which never came back from the blow.

In 1915 the prison purchased a printing press, and the *Mentor*'s "stylus, plate and mimeograph," wrote an inmate, "have been relegated to the limbo of obsolete things."¹⁸ Kemp, meanwhile, had died in prison apparently only months away from a pardon. The *Mentor*, in its new printed form, faded into the doldrums of the more institutional prison publications, devoted mostly to mediocre inmate poetry and fiction.

But before the *Mentor* lost its vigor, it had been - not unlike Minnesota's *Prison Mirror* - a prototype of the potential of a prison periodical when kept from the hands of the prison reformists. As even inmates who wrote for *Our Paper*, one of the reformists' model newspapers, said, "There is something about the *Mentor* which seems to us heroic."¹⁹ Unlike *Our Paper* or the *Summary*, the *Mentor* and the *Mirror* had been able, for a short while, to keep officials somewhat at bay. Granted, as the *Mentor* pointed out in its first issue, "if the authorities did not sanction the idea, would this issue appear? Not on your life."²⁰ But it was one thing for authorities to tolerate a prison publication, and it was another for them to establish one as part of their reforming goals. Within the obvious constraints of prison life at the end of the nineteenth century, the *Mentor* and the *Mirror* were pioneers of modern prison journalism.

*His full name is not known.

Chapter 7

The Subterranean Brotherhood

Hour by hour, in the cell overhead, Four footfalls, to and fro 'Twixt iron wall and barred door -Back and forth I hear them go -Four footfalls come and go! I wake and listen in the night: Brother, I know!

— Julian Hawthorne in *Good Words*, May 1913

In the late summer of 1913, two inmates of the Atlanta Federal Penitentiary were gazing out of the window of the isolation building. One of them, an older man in his late sixties with a drooping mustache, worked in the building writing articles for *Good Words*, the new prison newspaper. The other, who spent his time running errands for the administration, had just stopped by to chat. After observing fellow prisoners working in the yard below, the runner exclaimed, “Oh, the aimlessness of it! Why don’t you write a piece in our paper about the aimlessness of prison work?” “Why,” he continued with a sidelong grin at the journalist, “take what goes on in the printing office that you were assigned to, for instance. You have a month to get out the paper.... How long would it take to do that stunt in New York?”

“I suppose,” admitted the weary writer, “It could be done in twenty-four hours.”¹ But after several months in the penitentiary, Julian Hawthorne, journalist, author, and only son of Nathaniel Hawthorne, had resigned himself to the fact that deadlines no longer meant what they had when he worked at the *New York World*. Time means everything and nothing in prison. And besides, the print shop was always busy filling orders for the administration and the inmates’ newspaper had to wait for its turn on the presses.

“We were never sure, more than one month of publication, whether or not the paper would be available for another issue,” recalled Morgan Cozart, who edited *Good Words* after Hawthorne was released.² Nonetheless, writing for the paper offered Hawthorne, at the very least, a refuge from the banality

of prison life. The rules governing an inmate's life were so picky that, for example, they specified which side of the plate an inmate should leave his bread when finishing a meal.³ Writing also provided Hawthorne with some protection from the darker side of prison life. "It was plain that the officials took interest in the prison paper as a medium for advertising and gaining credit for the penitentiary; and when I began to write for it, newspapers all over the country quoted the articles and commented kindly on them," wrote Hawthorne after his release. "If, now, I were to be starved and clubbed, dungeoned and otherwise maltreated, not only would I be incapacitated from contributing to the paper, but some hint of the facts might leak out and impair the reputation of the Atlanta Penitentiary as a Gentleman's Club and Human Paradise."⁴



In what was probably the first political cartoon to appear in a prison publication, Uncle Sam ponders the ideas contained in *Good Words*, published at the Atlanta Federal Penitentiary. The illustration was published in the October 1913 issue.

Hawthorne had landed in the federal prison at the end of a long career as a writer. His father had advised him against pursuing a literary career, but after selling a story to *Harper's Weekly*, the younger Hawthorne became a prolific author. By his mid-thirties he had a good reputation both abroad and at home as a popular novelist. He also spent a number of years as a journalist, working for a variety of New York newspapers and magazines. In 1908, when he was 62, he wrote some letters on elegant stationery, embossed with the heading "Julian Hawthorne, Author, Journalist, and Historian," encouraging acquaintances to invest in a Canadian mining scheme. Even though he enjoyed a lucrative writing career, Hawthorne worried constantly about providing for his family during his retirement. When an old Harvard classmate approached him about the mining venture, Hawthorne seized the opportunity.

His solicitous letters brought in more than \$3 million. But, as the years passed and no dividends were paid to investors, complaints began to trickle into the Justice Department. In the fall of 1912 Hawthorne and his friends were brought before a federal judge on charges of mail fraud. Throughout the trial and the rest of his life, Hawthorne claimed the venture was legitimate and would one day make money. The jury, however, was not convinced, and in the spring of 1913 he was sentenced to serve one year in prison. The judge, however, in a moment of forgiveness ordered that his sentence include the time since he had been brought before the court.

In late March, in the company of federal marshals, Hawthorne and Dr. William Morton (one of his two cohorts; the other was appealing his case) traveled to the Atlanta penitentiary. There, the son of the author of *The Scarlet Letter* traded in his tweed suit, red necktie, and golf cap for the regulation gray prison garb with the number 4435 emblazoned on his breast. Hawthorne immediately settled into the routine of prison life. To Warden William Moyer's later chagrin, he assigned Hawthorne to write for *Good Words*. One supposes it would have been hard for Moyer to do anything else with a famed writer. Within a month of his arrival, Hawthorne's articles began appearing in *Good Words*.

Good Words was the first prison newspaper in a federal prison. Begun only the year before by Warden Moyer, it was entirely edited, written, and

printed by the inmates. In creating the publication, Moyer said - using words revealing that the religious fervor of the 1870 reformist had not yet completely faded - he hoped the six-page tabloid would provide messages from the “valley of humiliation” letting in “the sunshine of happiness to the stormy li [yes]” of his wards.⁵

The Atlanta Federal Penitentiary was almost as new as *Good Words*. The federal government had been rather late getting into the prison business, preferring to pay the states to hold prisoners convicted of federal crimes. It was not until 1891 that Congress had authorized the attorney general to operate three prisons around the country to confine violators of federal law with prison terms of one year or more. The first prison was built adjacent to the military prison at Leavenworth, Kansas. The second prison went up on land in Atlanta, Georgia, where the mayor of the city had made obtaining one of the new federal prisons a campaign pledge. The third prison was acquired by taking over the existing McNeil Island Penitentiary, a sixteen-year-old territorial prison on Puget Sound in the newly admitted state of Washington. It took almost another ten years of bickering over construction funds before work actually began on the new prisons. When Hawthorne arrived in Atlanta, in the spring of 1913, portions of the prison were still under construction, using inmate labor. Fewer than nine hundred inmates were then incarcerated. In ten years that number would triple.

Hawthorne resolved to use his time in prison as profitably as he could, despite his belief that he was being unfairly punished. “There are men in every jail who were wrongfully sent here, innocent of the crimes charged against them,” Hawthorne wrote in *Good Words*.⁶ Men of “good education, gentle breeding and high intelligence” (among whose ranks he included himself) were being confined in increasing numbers because the federal government was obtaining convictions for things not previously thought to be criminal, he charged. “The only difference between people inside the steel bars and those who are outside of them is that the former have been convicted of specific crimes by statute law and the latter have thus far escaped.”⁷

“The processes used to obtain convictions occasionally remind us of Russia,” he wrote. “Yet if they unexpectedly prove the means of admitting the angel of reform into prisons they may be worth the price.”⁸ Hawthorne regarded himself part of the angel’s vanguard and his pen his weapon. Issue

after issue of *Good Words* were dominated by the articles of the former “Journalist, Author, and Historian.” His work brought the paper alive.

Hawthorne knew he had a larger readership than the inmates enduring the Georgia heat that summer behind the walls of the Atlanta Federal Penitentiary. So did federal officials, who tried to limit Hawthorne’s access to outside readers. When the *Atlanta Journal*, for instance, wired the Justice Department for permission to interview Hawthorne upon his arrival, the attorney general himself turned them down cold. James McReynolds’s note read, in its entirety, “It is not deemed expedient to allow an interview with any United States prisoner in the Atlanta penitentiary.”⁹ Instead, newspapers around the country, including other prison newspapers, took to reprinting articles from *Good Words* with the byline No. 4435. The *New York Times*, for example, often published accounts of Hawthorne’s latest observations on prison life as each issue of *Good Words* was published. In fact, the *Times* erroneously reported that Hawthorne was the paper’s editor because it featured so much of his work.

The *New York Times* also bolstered the prominence of Hawthorne’s writing by taking the time and space to rebut his ideas on the editorial page. “Of course he had observed intelligently and is thoroughly competent to describe what he has seen,” wrote the *New York Times* editorial writer, “but it is possible to doubt the accuracy of his assumption that either the moral or the intellectual average of prison populations is higher now than ever before.” Improvements in prison conditions are due to “general social advances” rather “than the influence which Hawthorne credits,” concluded the *New York Times*.¹⁰

Even Hawthorne’s poems about convict life were widely circulated. One newspaper, the *Springfield Republican*, read his poem “Footfalls” so carefully that it suggested Hawthorne might be guilty of some unintentional plagiarism (see beginning of chapter.) The poem was about the ceaseless pacing of inmates in their cells, like animals in cages. The lines of the poem, noted the *Republican*, were almost too similar to “Walker” by Wobbly Arturo Giovanitti, written in jail while he awaited trial for his role in the Lawrence, Massachusetts, strike. *Good Words*’s editor assured readers that Hawthorne’s poem was original, conceived following a conversation with Hawthorne about the endless pacing of some of the inmates.

As trivial as the incident may seem, it demonstrates that considerable attention was being paid to what No. 4435 was writing, if for no other reason

than he was the son of an illustrious man of letters. But what he actually wrote was also being noticed. The *Washington Post*, for instance, said that through his work “Hawthorne has given his punishment an air of heroism.”¹¹

Keenly aware of his audience, Hawthorne used *Good Words* as a platform to reach outsiders to inform them of life behind bars and win support for a number of prison reforms. In his writings he hit upon some of the ever present themes of prison life. For example, following his conversation with the errand runner in the isolation building who complained about the aimlessness of prison work, Hawthorne used his platform to condemn it.

It is darkness and death to live an aimless life, and to condemn a man to such an existence is a crime. It is an unnatural and inhuman existence; revolt against it is instinctive and if repressed the result is despair. Men in jail have killed themselves, or done such desperate acts that would lead to their killing, because of the aimlessness of a jail routine; it is more intolerable than hardships, cruel punishments, or starvation diet; the impulse of self-preservation fights against it, knowing that it menaces the integrity of mind as well as of body. The man constrained to aimlessness is on the way to insanity; and not one case in a hundred of insanity in prison but is due to aimlessness in one aspect or another.¹²

Hawthorne thought that the most “unanswerable of all arguments” against prison is that no worthwhile work is given to inmates. “In the contract labor jails they are mere slaves driven literally to death by a merciless and insatiable bloodsucker called a contractor,” he wrote. “What prisoners demand, and have a right to demand, is work with an aim, in which they may intelligently and actively co-operate.” Even where some effort is being made to supply worthwhile jobs to inmates, it is being done only because a warden makes the effort. In the end, wrote Hawthorne, what is needed is the establishment of a uniform system of prison labor that would permit inmates to both earn an income and learn a skill. “No government, no community, has the right to keep men idle or aimless, least of all, men in jail.”¹³

In another article Hawthorne attacked the dress and numbering of prisoners. These practices combined with the prohibition on using proper names is calculated “to produce in the prisoner a feeling of radical and permanent separation from his fellow men.”¹⁴ Not without a sense of humor, Hawthorne remarked that one of the consolations of prison life was that when in the spring a young man’s fancy turns to his wardrobe, “Uncle Sam in his simple, undemonstrative way puts his tailor at our disposal, chooses the goods for us and pays the bill.”¹⁵

The attention Hawthorne received from the outside and his popularity among the inmates made the warden hesitant to restrict his writing inside the prison. On the outside, however, the Justice Department continued to limit Hawthorne from publishing his views in anything other than the controlled newspaper of the penitentiary. In early July, for example, Warden Moyer intercepted and forwarded to Washington a letter and an article from Hawthorne, protesting his conviction intended for Arthur Brisbane of the *New York Journal*. The article sought to correct items about his case that had appeared in other newspapers. “[We have] heretofore declined to permit prisoners in this penitentiary to write newspaper or magazine articles for sale,” wrote Moyer to the attorney general. “No definite action has been taken with regards to newspaper articles written by prisoners for publication which are intended to bring certain features of their respective case to the attention of the public.”¹⁶

Ernest Knaebel, an assistant attorney general, was assigned to the matter. He explained to his superior that Hawthorne was only seeking to correct “false impressions” stemming from an editorial in an Atlanta newspaper. “Owning to his prominence, the greater prominence of his father, and the great publicity of the facts, this defendant appears to be subject, peculiarly, to injury from false publications concerning him,” wrote Knaebel.¹⁷

His superiors were unmoved and decided that Hawthorne should not be allowed to submit the article to the New York newspaper. They concluded that it would only excite the public. “This he may be at liberty to do when he is at liberty,” W. R. Harr wrote in a department memorandum. “But at the present time he is legally deprived of his liberty, and has no legal right to communicate his opinion and views to the outside world.” Although prisoners were often granted the “privilege” to write friends and relatives “that privilege should not be granted when the tendency would be to prejudice the public against the administration of justice,” explained Harr.¹⁸

Within the prison, though, Hawthorne continued to publish material that normally would never have made it past a censor in most prison papers. In August, for instance, Hawthorne charged that older methods of punishment remained in use. “Shooting and clubbing prisoners and subjecting them to torture has proved unsuccessful in leading them toward sweetness and light; and such methods are now discontinued in *some* jails, though not so generally as some good people would like to believe,” he wrote.¹⁹

A month earlier Hawthorne, in one of the best articles he wrote during his sojourn in prison, alleged that conditions had not improved as fast as public opinion believed and that the public's ignorance of true conditions in penal institutions had allowed inhuman treatment of inmates to continue. "Society must doubtless be protected from criminals, but the criminal may sometimes need protection from society," he wrote. "The men in the cells, having seen courts of justice; at close quarters, and allowing for personal bias, reach the conclusion, not confined to them, that justice and courts of justice are not always the same thing." He believed that unless society took an interest in prisons they would squash what little sense of justice the convicts had. "A prisoner's sense of justice may be crude," admitted Hawthorne, "but if he loses that, he himself is lost beyond redemption, and that is not a result which prisons are supposed to be made for."²⁰

Hawthorne also attacked, with considerable vengeance, the popular theories of the "science of correction." In the last issue for which he would write, he claimed that Cesare Lombroso's theories of criminal type-then undergoing a revival in popularity - were simple nonsense. "If you attire the Members of Congress in striped suits no one would entertain any misgivings that the dark cell was the only proper place for them," he wrote. "And if you put a white necktie and silk hat on a murderer and bankrobber, everybody would greet him unsuspectingly as being all the things that he is not."²¹

Despite the attention lavished on Hawthorne from outside the penitentiary, he did not neglect his readers in prison. He wrote several articles on methods of self-improvement, suggesting that inmates use their idle time to study and otherwise improve themselves so as not to make their imprisonment a complete loss. In one article Hawthorne outlined specifically what books to read for a literary education and how best to read them. He also published a list of books and indicated which ones were missing in the prison library, prompting an outside reader to donate them.

Both Hawthorne and Dr. Morton, with whom he was sentenced, grew to feel a genuine sense of fraternity with their jailmates during their stay in the Atlanta penitentiary. Morton also contributed occasionally to *Good Words*. One article he wrote was a do-it-yourself guide to health care and first aid. After being rebuked in their first application for parole in August, the two were finally released in October 1913, one month early for good behavior. At the gates, Hawthorne told an awaiting reporter that during their seven-and-a-half month prison term, "Dr. Morton and I were well enough treated

but the prison is a living hell for the great majority of the convicts.”²² Warden Moyer immediately cabled the attorney general for permission to rebut Hawthorne’s charges, now carried on the front page of the *New York Times*. “Hawthorne and Morton charge men at prison are starved in the name of economy, never enough to eat, that I boast of feeding strong men on nine cents a day, that prisoners are confined in hole under prison and chained and strung up in terrific heat and stench and that whole system is of beast,” said Moyer. The following morning, McReynolds gave Moyer permission to issue a statement but warned him to “limit yourself to facts.”²³

Hawthorne’s charges weren’t as outrageous as officials would have liked the public to believe. In Hawthorne’s Justice Department file, for instance, there is a letter from a former inmate, now the co-owner of a general merchandise store, detailing his experiences in the hole.

I have spend 2 days and nights in there dark as dark can be. Chained up all day by the arms and each arm stretched out at night then chained. This may sound untrue but I can prove it. And while in the hole you are given 1 slice of light bread and 1 cup of water every 24 hours. During my visit there they fed men on an allowance of 15 cents per day each. After reading Hawthorne’s statement and then you being advised there was no such thing as the hole. I had to say something.²⁴

Moyer, as well as the Justice Department, was probably relieved to see the last of Hawthorne, but the editor of *Good Words* noted the departure of the writer and his friend with sadness. Their articles, he wrote, “have attracted the attention of the whole country to prisons and prison conditions.... Their coming to this prison benefitted the men here.”²⁵ Hawthorne, who had suggested in one of his first articles that the jailing of men like himself might help speed the reform of prisons, must have felt vindicated.

His writings, however, were immediately banned from the prison, and notes he had made while in the Atlanta prison were kept from him upon his release. *Good Words* reverted to its previous insipid style soon after Hawthorne’s departure. In fact, it finally became something more akin to the messenger of sunshine that Warden Moyer had intended all along.

Outside of prison Hawthorne rapidly produced a book on his stay in prison. Reflecting the fraternity he found among the inmates he called it the *Subterranean Brotherhood*. “My business in this book,” he wrote, “was to show that penal imprisonment is an evil, and its perpetuation a crime; that it does not reform the criminal but destroys him body and soul.”²⁶ Although the book was well reviewed, the war in Europe distracted the public’s

attention from the domestic concerns, and it did not sell well. Hawthorne and his family moved to California where, until his death in 1934, he spent the remainder of time writing occasional remembrances.

Chapter 8

Federal Scribes

WANTED-AN EDITOR: Secure position, a trifle confining, fair salary and ghost walks every Sunday morning. Applicants must have attended at least one session of a Federal court as an interested listener to a dissertation on time-by the judge.

—Advertisement in *New Era*, March 6, 1914

In February 1914, four months after Julian Hawthorne's release from the Atlanta Federal Penitentiary, a prison newspaper was established at the federal prison in Leavenworth, Kansas. As with the Atlanta penitentiary, the new federal prison at Leavenworth was still under construction during this period. The federal government had kept prisoners in Leavenworth since the mid-1890s, but they had been housed in an older military prison near the site of the new prison. At long last, in 1897, the construction Congress approved in 1891 was begun on a walled penitentiary capable of holding at least 1,200 prisoners. In 1906, the inmates were moved into the new prison, but it was not until 1927 that all the buildings in the original plan were completed. Like Atlanta, the scale of Leavenworth was immense. The front of the main building was more than eight hundred feet wide, with forty two-story windows at each side of an imposing entrance capped by a low rotunda. The layout of the plant consisted of schemes from both the Auburn and Sing Sing prisons, with the radial wings of the Pennsylvania prisons. The architect, who also had designed the Atlanta prison, wanted Leavenworth to "be as impressive as other national institutions" with monumental gateways and spacious parklike walkways.¹

There is no record of how the inmates at Leavenworth actually acquired a newspaper. The Federal Bureau of Prisons was not to be created for another sixteen years, so it is unlikely that the prison newspaper at Atlanta and the one under consideration in Leavenworth were the result of a policy decision. Rather, it is more likely that the papers were the ideas of like-minded

wardens. Most wardens, especially those at new institutions, were selected from the same pool of penologists heavily influenced by the prison reform movement. For instance, Leavenworth's first warden, Robert W. McClaughry, was president of the National Prison Association and had attended international prison reform meetings.² The only official explanation of the newspaper's origins was contained in the 1914 annual report from Leavenworth:

LEAVENWORTH NEW ERA

DEVOTED TO THE BEST INTERESTS OF PRISONERS EVERYWHERE

VOL. 1

LEAVENWORTH, KANSAS, FEBRUARY 27, 1914

No. 1



MAIN ENTRANCE TO THE UNITED STATES PENITENTIARY AS IT WILL APPEAR WHEN COMPLETED

A Sherlock Holmes Tells a Crook By Footprints

This Wonderful "Ologist" Folded
His Tent and Silently
Stole Away.

WHILE the war correspondent was making his daily rounds of the institution, "The Old-Timer," as he is best known, stopped him. "Say, my good man, do you want a story about the most wonderful man in the world?" Being assured that his mission on earth was to report such data, O. T. related the following:

"Of course we have a few very wonderful men behind these walls, but the man I want to describe is a marvel still at large. He is one of those "ologists," I think they call penologists, or some sort of conjurers. This man experimented on quite a few of our boys, while they were suffering with a new sort of fever, and in the majority of cases he actually told them what they were thinking about; and furthermore, what they would think about months, and years hence.

"This "ologist" is certainly some mind reader when it comes to foretelling events, as well as a man's past life. He can actually look at a track in the snow and tell whether it was made by a "crook" or an honest man. It was too dry last summer to make tracks on the farm, so this sooth-

ELLOW prisoners, we salute you, and extend the hand of sincere good-fellowship. Let us "reason together" from time to time in an earnest endeavor to make prison life really worth while. It is up to us to either make good or the reverse, and, by hearty co-operation, we hope to accomplish much good.

THE NEW ERA has an object in view—a definite purpose. In the world of journalism there must be messages from men who are either in the "slough of despond," or have successfully waded through it, and it is our earnest wish to offer a message of sunshine through the dark clouds of adversity. We hope to help men in various ways. It is our mission to gather messages of good cheer and convey them to the men behind prison walls.

To help men to help themselves, to be patient under necessary restrictions, encourage cheerfulness in adversity, extend hope for the future, to assist them to re-establish themselves as honest, upright citizens, is our aim.

sayer suggested a system of sprinkling the land by means of overhead pipes.

Some of the boys in the farm gang said he suggested putting the entire farm into red onions (the strong kind) and feed them to the men as a daily life-staff."

When asked if this wonderful psychologist, sociologist or penologist, would return here again, the O. T. smiled dimly and said: "No, he will probably never come back! He has gone to join the other "ologists" to seek pastures new. Oh yes! the people

are easily fooled, and the bigger the humbug the better they like it." Just at this part of the story his pipe went out.

We are in the market, at current rates, for high-class human interest stories, choice verse and literary gems. Brush away mental cobwebs and get busy—there's money in it.

In subsequent issues we expect to run a better class of dope, including rich and racy articles from noted writers—behind the bars.

Recent Revolt Proves Value of "Honor System"

Oklahoma Prison Warden Will
continue to Use Gentle Re-
formatory Measures.

HERE will be no curtailing of privileges to convicts in the Oklahoma Penitentiary as a result of the recent riot in which seven men, including three prison officials and three prisoners, were killed. Instead of being dismayed in his policy of leniency toward "honor men," Warden R. W. Dick is more than ever convinced that there is justice in his management of the penitentiary.

"Some people have contended that the trusty system is a failure and cite the trouble we have just had as an evidence of their assertion," said Warden Dick.

"To my mind, it was the supreme test of our system of discipline and the result has made me more firmly convinced than ever that the system is right. Not only did the trustees aid the prison officials in their attempt to recapture the fugitives, but assistance was also given by the men from the cells, and while the prison doors stood wide open for a period of several minutes in the midst of excitement, not a man, outside the three, tried to escape. It was the acid test that the right kind of treatment will

(Concluded on page four)

Front page of the first edition of the Leavenworth *New Era* (February 27, 1914).

On February 27, 1914, with the consent of the Department, the publication of a weekly newspaper, the Leavenworth *New Era*, was begun. The paper is edited entirely by prisoners subject to the censorship of the warden. It was a conspicuous success from the first issue and has continued steadily to improve. The *New Era* has attracted favorable attention from journalists, institution workers, etc.³

In comparison to other federal prison newspapers, and certainly in comparison to many state prison newspapers, the new publication at Leavenworth looked more like an outside newspaper. It was printed on newspaper stock and, set in a common typeface, and the news was displayed in columns with modest headlines. The only thing that revealed the newspaper's origins to an alert reader was that like the *Prison Mirror*, its most important stories related to prison life. For example, in its first issue *New Era* reported on the front page that inmates in Oklahoma would suffer no curtailment of privileges because of a riot there, which left seven dead including three officials. (Similar items would later be censored from many prison newspapers because officials believed they would encourage disruptive behavior.) It also reported on the court fight of Iowa inmates against a new law providing for the sterilization of the insane, diseased, and criminal wards of the state.

From its very first issue *New Era* showed a greater promise than Atlanta's *Good Words* of becoming an independent newspaper and a more vigorous advocate of inmate rights. "'The truth about penal servitude is good enough' will be our motto," proclaimed John B. Dickinson, its first editor. While it would not "laud local officials nor criticize the acts of those in authority," *New Era* promised its coverage of prison life would be intended to improve prison conditions.⁴ "New Era's mission is this: to fight the battles of right and just treatment for our prisoners, not only here but everywhere."⁵

New Era's concern for prisoners in all prisons distinguished it from *Good Words* and the other federal prison newspaper that would be launched at the McNeil Island Penitentiary, in Washington, several years later. The other newspapers were more parochial in their interests. The editors of *New Era*, on the other hand, believed that the struggle to improve prisons had to be waged by all prisoners. Their sentiment was that what affected prisoners in one state affected inmates in another. In its various campaigns for reform, for instance, the *New Era* called on other prison newspapers to join them in their

fight from the start. “Let us fill our ink bottles, get a fresh supply of pen points and paper and go to it,” wrote the first editor of *New Era*.⁶

New Era, for example, demanded that other papers join in the fight for the compensation of prison labor. The lack of it defeated the very purpose of sending men to prison, Dickinson wrote in the spring of 1914. “Instead of society making a sincere effort to reform a man, it has deformed him,” he said. The lack of compensation “breaks up the home, casts the children into the street, the wife into the poorhouse.” Meanwhile society “sits back in its easy chair and bewails the increase of crime, never giving heed to the remedy that lies close at hand.”⁷ To make matters worse, lamented *New Era*, the federal policy sent an inmate out into the world again equipped only with a new suit and a five-dollar bill. An inmate with no friends or family would soon use the five dollars and be faced with stealing in order to feed or shelter himself. Quite a few other states, pointed out *New Era*, have provided more generously for their inmates. “Our Uncle Sam has neglected us entirely along this line, and needs to be coaxed, so we are going to coax him.”⁸

In July 1914, Dickinson was released from prison and wrote a farewell to his readers. “Editing a prison paper is not, as many believe ‘one long, sweet dream,’ but difficult, uphill work,” he wrote.⁹ His associate, C. M. Wilson, assumed the post of editor. (We know their names because also in July the paper abandoned its policy of identifying inmates only by their numbers.) *New Era*’s crusading spirit, supplied by Dickinson and Wilson, was greatly enhanced by Jack Foster, who was its third editor and remained in the post until his parole at the end of 1918. His work attracted the attention of reformers, politicians, and newspapers around the country. The *New York Telegraph*, for instance, judged *New Era* worthy of first honors in a lengthy review of “Literature in Prison” published while Foster was editor.

Under Foster, *New Era* also continued to devote considerable space to reflection about its craft. Its editorial page was frequently devoted to pieces like “The Real Purpose of a Prison Paper,” “What is the Pre-Eminent Purpose of the New Era?” and “Is the Prison Press Fulfilling Its Mission?” Minehart, one of the first editors, had asserted that the prison press was “the only agency so far established by which the prison body can cross the gulf fixed by judicial mandate and maintained by social ostracism.” The concept of a prison newspaper as a way for inmates to reach outsiders, articulated here by Minehart and later by Foster and his successor Everett W. Andrews, is one of the most constant themes in prison journalism’s history. It is as if

for many inmates a prison newspaper struck a blow against the isolation of life behind bars. The sense of separation from society, especially in a place like Leavenworth, thousands of miles from home, was frequently remarked upon by inmates in this era. The prison newspaper “is the only instrumentality available,” wrote Minehart, “through which it [the prison population] can cause its voice to be heard and heeded by the great bustling world beyond the walls.”¹⁰ Foster’s successor, Andrews, outlined his own view that prison newspapers had a twofold mission:

One is to give the prisoners themselves an interest in the things that go on in the institution; the other, and, perhaps, the more vital, is to mould public opinion by its message of life within the walls. The prison newspaper is the child of an age of advanced thought and social reform.”¹¹

Andrews continued the reformist spirit that imbued the paper and kept the pages of *New Era* open to a wide array of writers, including revolutionaries (see [Chapter 9](#)). The Foster conviction that the primary goal of prison newspapers ought to be penal reform and that it ought to be pursued in concert led Andrews in 1919 to propose creating a Prison Press Association. Anyone who has read the many different prison papers now being published in the United States, Andrews told his readers, knows that they are making strides toward reform. Specifically, Andrews cited the work of *Lend A Hand*, published by the inmates of the Oregon Penitentiary; the *Bulletin*, of San Quentin, California, *Square Deal*, of the Kansas State Penitentiary, *Good Words*, of Atlanta; “and many others, each and all of them, without an exception, [which] are fighting the fight for the hundreds of thousands in prison.”¹²

“There is, however, one great lack,” wrote Andrews. “That of cooperation between the different editors of these publications.” A league, as he called it, would harness the work of all the prison publications to influence the metropolitan newspapers, then considered the leading opinion-setting medium of the era. The league could rival the Associated Press and United Press and publish a national magazine promoting penal reform by featuring the best of the prison newspapers. The magazine would be commercially supported with subscribers and advertising and would pay inmates for their contributions.¹³

To his immense frustration, only *Good Words* and *Lend A Hand* showed any interest in the idea. “Is there any excuse for this apathy on the part of the prison press?” wrote Andrews. “With the exception of the above-named

papers you all show a woeful lack of interest.... Men and women, we beg of you think. This movement shall not die in the homing.... It must go on! It shall go on!"¹⁴ It did not, and the idea never again resurfaced.

Despite the lack of response to its call for an alliance, *New Era* remained a strong and articulate advocate of a number of important prison reforms into the mid-1920s. Its biggest effort was expended on behalf of the movement for the establishment of public defense (or "free justice," as it was then called), for the compensation of prison labor, and for an increase in the amount of money given to freedom-bound inmates. "The state, as well as the Federal courts, spare no expense in securing witnesses for their side of the case, why not give the accused an equal chance?" said one of *New Era*'s many editorials for free justice.¹⁵ The paper's championing of this and other prison issues attracted the attention of a number of prominent social reformers. Its Christmas issues, for example, regularly contained greetings, letters, and articles from famous social activists such as Jane Addams and Kate Barnard.

New Era's influence was felt at McNeil Island, Washington, the third in the federal penal triumvirate. In 1920, inmates of the former territorial prison pooled their funds and purchased a seven-by-eleven-foot, foot-powered printing press to launch their own newspaper. Unfortunately, the press was broken when it was delivered to the rugged, wooded island twelve miles south of Tacoma. Another four years elapsed until Finch Archer, McNeil's new warden and one of the most colorful of federal prison officials, approved the idea of an inmate publication at his prison. To procure the necessary equipment, Chaplain C. W. Burr resurrected the old broken press. He obtained a case and a half of type from some Tacoma printers and got someone to weld the bedplate back together. On April 1, 1924, the first issue of the *Island Lantern* rolled off the press. The name of the publication was the idea of the warden's wife. The *Lanterns* success among the inmates permitted the retirement of the antique presses and their replacement with two motor-driven units obtained from the Veterans Bureau by the end of the decade.¹⁶

The *Lantern* was edited during its first years by Frederick Emerson Peters, a confidence man. He was "one of the most competent swindlers who had ever charmed the rich and naive - to their loss and his profit," according to Paul W. Keve, who wrote a history of the McNeil Island Penitentiary. Peters had managed, upon his arrival at McNeil, to ingratiate himself with Archer,

who employed him as his chauffeur, even trusting him with the car while attending meetings in town. In the prison, Peters was not assigned to a cell block. Rather he lived in a small shack on the ground with another inmate, virtually free to come and go from the prison as he pleased.¹⁷

Archer put Peters in charge of the *Island Lantern*. He improved the format of the nascent publication and gave it a professional sheen. “Certainly this was part of his swindle, too, part of the image he maintained in order to impress his custodians and sustain his privileged status,” wrote Keve. “But no doubt he also enjoyed the editorship for its own sake.”¹⁸ The content of the *Lantern* was more reminiscent of the *Summary* at Elmira than of the other two federal prison papers. The March 1929 issue, for instance, contained articles on the French juvenile court system, Belgian prison reforms, an Australian prison farm, and several on psychiatry.

In 1931, Peters was released. Apparently he resumed his life of crime, charging a shopping spree in downtown Seattle to Warden Archer before disappearing.¹⁹ The quality of the *Island Lantern* declined under succeeding editors until it retrogressed into a mimeographed newsletter.*

Meanwhile, in the late 1920s, James Bennett was touring the nation looking at prison conditions in federal facilities as an investigator for Sanford Bates, superintendent of prisons. After visiting Leavenworth he found himself seated on a bench at the bus stop outside the unfinished facade of the penitentiary. He was, as he later recalled in his memoir, reflecting on the difficulty of reforming the prisons he was touring. “Then, a short man with graying hair, dressed in blue cotton pants and a chambray shirt worn by the prisoners, sat down on the bench beside me.” The man struck up a conversation, admitting that the prison grapevine had revealed Bennett’s identity and purpose.

When the prisoner asked Bennett if he read the *New Era*, Bennett realized he was talking to its newest editor, Dr. Frederick Cook. “Cook pointed to the unfinished dome of the penitentiary, then second in size in the country only to the U.S. Capitol dome in Washington,” recalled Bennett. “Would another generation pass,” Cook asked, “before we accepted the fact that our prison system was as far from reality as that preposterous dome?”

“Cook was right,” wrote Bennett, who later became the head of the Bureau of Prisons. “Nothing I had seen at Leavenworth could even remotely be termed rehabilitative.”²⁰

Cook became the most famous editor of the *New Era*. His exploits already had made him among the best-known Americans of the time. He had come to live at Leavenworth by much the same route that Hawthorne had followed to Atlanta. Only, in his case, the jury and judge were not so charitable. Convicted on charges of mail fraud in connection with an oil company he had founded in Texas, Cook had been sentenced to fourteen years in prison. Before his demise Cook had made his fame as an explorer of the Poles. But, as in all he did, it was accompanied by controversy. In 1908, Cook, traveling with two Eskimos and two sleds, claimed to have reached the North Pole. He was welcomed to Copenhagen, Denmark, upon his return from the frozen north as a hero. Two days later Robert Peary sent a cable from a remote Labrador settlement announcing that he had reached the Pole. Cook failed to convince the scientific community of his claim, and for the next five years he waged a bitter public debate with Peary. On the whole Cook fared better in the public arena than the crotchety Peary, but organizations such as the National Geographic Society remained unconvinced of Cook's claim.

In 1917, Cook discovered some oil in Wyoming while on a geological expedition. He used the money he made from his North Pole exploits to start an oil company in Texas. In promoting his company, Cook, as Hawthorne had once done, promised great returns that never materialized. The federal government caught up with him, and on April 6, 1925, while schoolchildren were celebrating the sixteenth anniversary of Peary's discovery of the North Pole, Cook entered the Leavenworth penitentiary. After a year in prison Cook began to contribute articles to *New Era*. He began his association with the paper by writing a series of articles unrelated to prison life. "It is my purpose," he explained, "to indicate in a series of articles to appear in *New Era* the new lands of promise and new methods of conquest for the type of man who had made the great American West the pride of our Nation."²¹ The articles, called "Worlds to Conquer," were devoted to such diverse topics as the sea as a future source of wealth, how to start a wolf farm to breed animals for their pelts, and lengthy tributes to such things as the virtue of the musk ox.

In 1926, Cook assumed the editorship of the paper, and it soon began to reflect his eccentric interests. During the next four years, *New Era*, which now appeared monthly, featured long defenses of his polar claims and essays on such attention-getting ideas as developing a new strain of Pygmies, for use as servants in industrialized countries. Though considered more a

curiosity than anything else, Cook was certainly loved by his fellow inmates. In March 1930, he was released on parole after serving almost five years. The night before his release a dinner was given in his honor by sixty prisoners. *New Era* noted his departure on its front page, and his successor wrote that “no more a noted prisoner was ever committed to a federal penitentiary … and … was ever held in higher esteem by officials and inmates alike.”²² But the controversy over his polar expedition still stirred enough passion among the public that one person organized a letter-writing campaign seeking to deny the aging Cook his freedom.

During Cook’s editorship, the *New Era* ceased to be a strong advocate of inmate rights and an independent inside observer of prison life. The publication, which had already wandered far from its original purpose, had followed Cook on an esoteric journey. “‘Doc,’ as all of us called him, used to fill the greater part of his magazine with glowing accounts of his Arctic explorations and the great opportunities that awaited anyone there with the means to exploit them,” recalled Leavenworth inmate Morris “Red” Rudensky. “The boys just didn’t go for his kind of shop talk. They were more interested in local explorations - things they felt needed talking about, and not just iceberg history.”²³

Rudensky ought to have known. A former gangster, he had been in and out of prison since about 1910. Shortly after Cook’s departure from Leavenworth, Rudensky was transferred to Atlanta where, after a few years, he too became a prison journalist. Red, as he liked to be called, was a colorful character whose long years behind bars brought him in contact with such men as Communist Earl Browder, who taught English at Leavenworth; Bob Stroud, later known as the “Birdman of Alcatraz”; and Al Capone, with whom he shared a cell at the Atlanta prison. Browder, Rudensky later wrote, taught him “more about the English language in my year and a half stay than I had learned in a lifetime.”²⁴

After Rudensky arrived in the Atlanta penitentiary, the editor of *Good Words* suggested to Rudensky, who was becoming a “model” prisoner, that he write an article on preparing oneself for a new life outside. “Why he picked on me to deliver the message is beyond me, unless he thought as I wrote it might bring home to me the much needed lesson,” wrote Rudensky.²⁵

Good Words had hardly changed in the years since Hawthorne left, and it had reverted to a preachy, moralistic publication. It almost completely

ignored news within the prison. For example, when President Harding freed Eugene Debs and other political prisoners in December 1921, *New Era* praised the act. *Good Words*, on the other hand, remained silent. It even ignored Debs's departure from prison, even though the event was felt throughout the prison, as Warden Fred Zerbst opened each cell block to permit the inmates to see the famous radical off.²⁶ The new editorial stance of *Good Words*, however, was not a problem for Rudensky. He was most fond of writing miniature sermons on the virtue of rehabilitation, and *Good Words* always had space for that kind of material. After getting his first article published Rudensky began to write all the time. "Over the next few years," he said, "I fell in love with journalism."²⁷

In the summer of 1938, the inmates who published *Good Words* decided to scrap the paper and begin a new one in a magazine format. In its beginning years the magazine, the *Atlantian*, reflected the editors' timidity. A magazine, they wrote, is a "rare privilege" granted to inmates, and "we accept it as such and not a right."²⁸ Rudensky was given the job of associate editor, and he began to look around the prison for material. At first he wrote several profiles of fellow inmates. One, a particularly touching sketch, was about an inmate who had been in the prison since it opened. "Unk," whose prison number was 22, spent his days tending a small grave where he had buried his pet pigeon "whose little house still stands as a monument near the white-picketed and well-kept cemetery."²⁹

THE ATLANTIAN



FEBRUARY 1939

The *Atlantian*, which succeeded *Good Words* as the inmate publication of the Federal Penitentiary at Atlanta, grew into one of the best-known prison publications.

In time Rudensky would move from writing profiles to a more central role at the *Atlantian*. “To write about ‘sunlit forest nights and starry skies’ is alright for those who view the world through rose-colored glasses,” wrote Rudensky in 1938, “but hardly the dish for or from us, as a whole.” Instead he came to see the *Atlantian* as “our only means of showing that we are not as bad as we are purported to be, and that we are very desirous of reclaiming ourselves.”³⁰ Within a few years, Rudensky became a leading figure at the penitentiary. He organized shows and athletic contests and was the master of ceremonies any time the prison had a visiting celebrity. One such visitor was Margaret Mitchell, author of *Gone with the Wind*. She and Rudensky became good friends, and together they organized the Margaret Mitchell Writing Contest through the *Atlantian*. Held annually, the competition was judged by five journalists, and the five winning entries split one hundred dollars in prize money. After Mitchell’s death her husband, John R. Marsh, expanded the contest to add a school of creative writing at the prison, using for faculty such accomplished journalists as William Howland of *Time* and *Life* and Celestine Sibley of the *Atlanta Constitution*.

Rudensky’s work as a propagandist for virtuousness in prison came to a peak with the advent of World War II. Rudensky ascended to editor-in-chief around the time of the Pearl Harbor attack. In his first editorial in his new post, Rudensky wrote a piece he called “Memorandum of Faith.” “We who have forfeited our liberties are aware of the great national emergency which exists,” it read in part, “for these reasons.... We are deeply desirous of doing something at this time which will be of weight toward accomplishing the Nation’s security.”³¹

Overnight, Rudensky transformed the *Atlantian* into a chronicler of the war effort behind bars. Endless space in succeeding issues was devoted to articles on the war products prisoners were churning out, the malaria experiments conducted with volunteer convicts, and the blood banks organized by inmates. In addition the *Atlantian* produced at least one book-length issue on the war effort in all the federal prisons. None of this went unnoticed. In 1943, with the recommendation of top prison officials, Rudensky was paroled. Following a short stint in an Illinois prison for, as he put it, “climbing a wall,” Rudensky moved to St. Paul, Minnesota, where he was hired by an advertising firm.

The war fever that Rudensky rode to prominence was also felt in Leavenworth. The inmates there purchased \$86,025 in war bonds and donated \$3,034.98 to service organizations with daily earnings that amounted to less than, as one Congressman noted, what “many of us Congressmen spend a day for cigars.” One thousand four hundred of the inmates also gave 1,335 pints of blood. None of these deeds escaped the attention of the *New Era*. It launched a campaign to permit the use of prisoners in the military. Though the editors never achieved their goal, they felt that at last their publication was reaching the nation’s leaders. In 1943, Congressman Chester H. Gross introduced legislation to alter the draft laws so that the Army could enlist inmates. To the inestimable pride of *New Era* editors, in his speech on the floor, Gross quoted at length their editorial.³²

*The Island Lantern was revived in the 1960s.

Chapter 9

Can Opener, New Era, and the Wobblies

To be in prison is no tragedy, the tragedy is that some are out.

—The *Can Opener*,
published by members of
Industrial Workers of the World
in Cook County Jail, Chicago, Illinois

On September 13, 1918, when *New Era* was a little over four and a half years old, a small article in the corner of the back page, announced that “the eyes of the nation were focused on this prison last Saturday.” The occasion, explained the reporter, “was the arrival here of ninety-four members of the Industrial Workers of the World” (IWW).¹ The Wobblies, as they were nicknamed, had been sent to Leavenworth on a myriad of charges as part of a widespread campaign by the federal government against threatening radical organizations, especially those who opposed the war effort.

The IWW, led by “Big” Bill Haywood, had been forged in the labor strife of the West at the turn of the century and had become one of the best organized radical labor unions to ever confront the American establishment. It wanted nothing less than the complete transformation of society, and it planned to accomplish it by organizing workers in “one big union.” No “labor group ever caught the American imagination in quite the same way,” wrote historian Melvyn Dubofsky.²

Now, at the height of the Great Red Scare, a jury gave the government what it wanted. Convicted on separate counts of having committed more than ten thousand crimes, Haywood and the entire leadership of the union were being put behind bars. The arrival of the Wobblies at Leavenworth constituted the largest group of prisoners ever received at one time since the prison opened. They were escorted into the chapel where, according to *New*

Era, “in carefully chosen words, warden Thomas Morgan assured Wobblies that the administration of the prison entertains no prejudice against them because of their membership in any organization.” The new arrivals would have the same rights and privileges as any other incoming inmates, said Morgan. A few hours later, clothed in prison garb, the Wobblies were led to their cells. “Within twenty-four hours from the time the ‘special’ came puffing into the prison,” reported *New Era*, “a visitor could not have detected the first indication of any new arrivals.”³

The fact that *New Era* covered the arrival of these prisoners is significant. Atlanta also had received some political prisoners, but *Good Words* never made any mention of it, even when one of them, socialist Eugene Debs, received nearly one million votes for president during his confinement there. *New Era*, on the other hand, not only covered the arrival of the noted prisoners but opened its pages to them. Two of them, Charles Ashleigh and Ralph Chaplin, accepted *New Era*s solicitation.

The pair were well-known members of the IWW. Chaplin was considered the Wobblies’ poet laureate. In 1915 he composed “Solidarity Forever,” which became the best-known union song of the American labor movement and is still sung today. A Kansan by birth, Chaplin had joined the IWW in 1913, when he was twenty-six, and placed his skills as a writer and poet in service of the union. By 1916 he was editor of *Solidarity*, the IWW newspaper.

Ashleigh was also one of the IWW’s chief publicists. An Englishman, he had come to the United States in 1912, at age twenty, after spending two years traveling through South America. He joined the IWW upon his arrival and went to work as an organizer. A wordsmith like Chaplin, Ashleigh also understood the power of song and humor, and the two frequently wrote new lyrics to popular melodies and hymn tunes. The IWW was “one of the few radical movements ever to possess a sense of humor,” wrote Walter Rideout, a student of the radical literary tradition in the United States. “The IWW was also a revolution with a singing voice.”⁴

In September 1917, Chaplin and Ashleigh, along with ninety other Wobblies, were arrested in Chicago. Unlike the others, Ashleigh did not look like much of a laborer. He favored tweed coats and had an elegant air about him. John Reed, who covered the IWW trial in Chicago upon his return from witnessing the Russian Revolution, described Ashleigh as “fastidious, sophisticated with the expression of a well bred Puck.”⁵

For eight months before the trial and during the five months of the trial, the Wobblies were confined to the Cook County Jail in Chicago. There Ashleigh and Chaplin had their first experience with prison journalism. The Wobblies, who were kept in one section of the jail, organized educational and entertainment programs. "Each week," recalled Chaplin, "an illustrated program would be prepared and circulated from cell to cell announcing such features as 'Anecdotes, by James Thompson,' 'Recitation, by Charles Ashleigh,' 'Spanish Duet, by Vicente Azuara and Manuel Rey,' or 'Monologue — the Girl Who Was Seven Feet Tall, by William Dudley Haywood.'"⁶ In time, the program grew into a sixteen-page newspaper called the *Can Opener*, which according to Chaplin, contained "articles, cartoons, and poems of the 'best available I.W.W. talent.'"⁷ Ashleigh served as the first editor and Chaplin as the second, each with the assistance of another inmate.

The *Can Opener* was a lively little sheet, devoted in great part to making fun of the IWW members' captors and their captivity. There is only one copy extant, dated November 15, 1917. Handwritten on brown paper, the surviving issue is defiant, humorous, and lavishly illustrated. Its front-page banner headline "WUXTRA! ! i.w.w. PLOT JAIL DELIVERY NIPPED IN BUD" introduced a sarcastic piece alleging that a "bean was found in the cell of A. Wobbly" and that authorities believe the inmate was planning on using the bean in a slingshot to effect an escape. Above it all, perched on the masthead, was a cat peering down on the news below. On a more serious note, the issue also included a five-page essay on events leading to the upcoming trial. "Labor's intelligence, solidarity, resourcefulness, staying qualities and devotion to the cause of genuine democracy is on trial," read the essay, likely to have been written by Haywood.⁸

Chaplin recalled the contents of other issues. One poked fun at attempts by prison authorities to discipline the Wobblies following a Thanksgiving Day protest over the menu. The demonstrating inmates were removed to an area of the prison known as "the island" because of its isolation. "The society section of the *Can Opener*," wrote Chaplin, "carried a brief notice to the effect that we were spending the holidays 'on the island.'" Another issue featured a cartoon with the caption "Christ before Landis" after the Wobblies made their first appearance before Judge Kenesaw Mountain Landis, who would preside over their trial in 1918.⁹ The *Can Opener*, aside from affording "some of the men an opportunity to pass away the time," as

Haywood recalled, served to remind those outside of the jail of the Wobblies' unbroken spirit.¹⁰ It was also sold at auction to raise defense funds.

In August, the Wobblies' stay in the Cook County Jail came to an end when they were found guilty. Judge Landis sentenced the group to jail terms ranging from ten to thirty-five years. Chaplin and Ashleigh each received twenty-year sentences. They were still defiant. Chaplin, trying to control his anger, told Landis, "I am proud to have climbed high enough for lightning to strike me!"¹¹ Ashleigh promised that "the day that I leave jail I shall recommence those activities on behalf of humanity and the working class for which you are sentencing me today."¹² Shackled together, Chaplin, Ashleigh, and all ninety Wobblies were put on a special train bound for Leavenworth.

The first night there, Ashleigh shared a cell with Haywood on the fifth tier. The next morning, he and Chaplin were assigned to work in the fingerprint identification bureau maintained at Leavenworth by the Justice Department. It was a plum job, Chaplin recalled, because it allowed time for writing. In November, Ashleigh took advantage of that time to organize a class. He, Chaplin, and some other inmates gathered on a section of a rock pile in the prison yard to discuss the Mexican and Russian Revolutions, history, philosophy, and sometimes even subjects as far afield as medieval balladry. They called the spot "the campus."¹³ From these meetings came the idea of teaching a course in English for Russian, Swedish, Polish, Mexican, Spanish, Dutch, Hungarian, and Swiss inmates. Ashleigh's plan was to go beyond the instruction of working English, available in the prison, to provide foreign inmates with speaking and writing skills. In mid-November, Ashleigh submitted an article about his "school of nations" to the *New Era*, and editor Jack Foster published it. In the piece, Ashleigh boasted his course was "the most unique class that has ever formed part of any school in prison or out." Many foreign inmates were proficient in mathematics, history, and other subjects. "Their need is the intensive study of the English language — grammar, composition, rhetoric and diction," said Ashleigh, who spoke a number of languages, served as an interpreter during the trial, and later translated Russian and German novels.¹⁴

Nothing is known about what eventually happened to his prison course, but during that winter Ashleigh began to take an interest in *New Era*. Though the paper was carefully watched by prison officials, its editorial

content was exceedingly liberal for a prison newspaper. A section of *New Era*, for instance, was devoted to what was titled “News and Views from the Labor World.” It included reports on organizing drives, and in the issue in which Ashleigh’s first article appeared, it even featured an item concerning the oppression of the IWW in Canada.* The freedom afforded *New Era*, however, did not mean that life in Leavenworth was similarly progressive. For example, Mennonite conscientious objectors were also confined at Leavenworth during these years. Their beards were cut off and they were forced to wear prison garb with buttons, a prohibited item in their religion. In return, about a dozen of them refused to work and were cruelly abused. Rather, officials probably left *New Era* alone because of its visibility outside of the prison. During Jack Foster’s editorship the paper had grown so that in 1919 it had a wider circulation outside of the prison than inside. Second, the *New Era* staff, which came from an educated and literate strata of the inmate population, tended to have friends outside with greater influence than those of the average inmate. Among them were Upton Sinclair, who donated books to the library, Jane Addams, and Kate Barnard. Additionally, the presence of the IWW certainly increased the visibility of the prison. The deputy warden, reported the IWW’s *One Big Union Monthly*, “has found that since the I.W.W boys have come there the place has become a regular mecca.”¹⁵

In January 1919, Everett Andrews succeeded Foster, who was released from prison. Andrews believed that the role of the prison newspaper was to supply the forces of reform with knowledge of prison life. “No reform - and this is the age of reform - can be accomplished from the outside,” he wrote. “We should strive to give to the world an accurate picture of our life behind bars, a picture based on truth.”¹⁶

In March, Andrews accepted an article from Ashleigh on the debate within the pages of *New Era* as to the purpose of a prison newspaper. A prison newspaper should not simply reprint news from other papers, wrote Ashleigh, otherwise it will be only “a species of museum for the collection of journalistic fossils, excavated by the editor with shears.” An inmate newspaper should be just that-a newspaper, he wrote, not a means of conveying moral lessons weekly. “In other words, the editor should do more news gathering and less fulminating.” The paper does not belong to the editor, said Ashleigh, but to the inmates. It should be “as free and unfettered an expression of the prison body as possible.” To do that, he proposed, it

should seek more contributions from inmates, and instead of being “smugly self-satisfied” it “should humbly and conscientiously endeavor to find out what the inmates want - and give it to them!”¹⁷

In deciding to write for *New Era*, Ashleigh understood he would be restricted as to what he could say. *New Era* was no *Can Opener*. He admitted, after he became a regular contributor, that he was “compelled to alter somewhat” at least once in a while the things he wrote “in order to pass the censor.”¹⁸ Considering the restrictions, he decided to devote his writing skills, previously used to popularize the Wobblies’ cause, to “providing sheer amusement.” “After all,” he wrote, “life is not all grey theory; there are times when the soul craves the frivolous and the nonsensical and the colorful.”¹⁹ Thus, in the summer of 1919, he began a series of sketches of his past wandering, of real and imagined encounters and short essays on popular topics. In October, Ashleigh began editing a weekly column. Called “Guarded Remarks,” it was “released by Ashleigh” each week on the inside pages of *New Era*. It featured bits of humor picked up around the prison, letters to him from inmates, and a favorite of his, peculiar headlines from newspapers. In addition, he created fictitious characters to answer queries from readers in his column. To handle health-related questions, for example, Ashleigh introduced “the renowned physician, surgeon, osteopath, homeopath, naturopath, by-path, chiropodist, neurologist, bromide and homicide, Dr. J. Buzzard.”²⁰ “I am a humorous newspaper writer,” he admitted in a fictitious story of his search for the fountain of rejuvenation.²¹ He made no mention in the *New Era* of his association with the Wobblies or his politics.

In June of 1920, Ashleigh and other Wobblies were released on an appeal bond pending a review of their convictions by the Supreme Court. “Regardless of his religious or political beliefs,” wrote Joe Kerwin, editor of *New Era* upon Ashleigh’s departure, “there was that about him which attracted the attention and commanded the respect of those who knew him. He was not a man who could be severed from the path of what he believed right.”²² Upon his release Ashleigh toured the country with other Wobblies, speaking on behalf of their cause. He also joined the newly formed American Communist Party and along with Chaplin, also out on bond, traveled to the East Coast to meet John Reed who was returning with Russian jewels to fund the new (A.C.P.) Reed, however, was arrested in Finland and never made it back to the States.

In the spring of 1921, the Supreme Court decided that it would not alter the lower court's conviction of the Wobblies. Thirty-seven of the forty-six Wobblies out on bond surrendered. "Little Lord Fauntleroy Ashleigh is with us again," editor Kerwin wrote. "May the Lord sharpen his wit and shorten his time."²³ Ashleigh's column resumed in May with the headline "The Prodigal Returns." "You can't blame me for the renewal of this column," he wrote, "I didn't want to come back." However, he said, life outside was not all that great either. Prices were high, rents were exorbitant, factories and mills were closing down, he wrote, and "then there are awful happenings contingent upon the introduction of prohibition."

"Here, at last, one may arrive at comparative peace," wrote Ashleigh. "Here, also, one may encounter a journalism unencumbered by the many setbacks and harassments which corrugate the vaulting brows of outside' editors and writers."²⁴ He was, however, required to alter a bit of poetry he appended to column in order to satisfy the censor.²⁵ For the next few months he amused himself by writing lengthy descriptions of life in the cities through which he traveled during his ten-month hiatus outside of Leavenworth. His fellow Wobbly, Chaplin, also back in Leavenworth, resumed contributing poems to *New Era*, many of which were subsequently published in a collection called *Bars and Shadows*. The pair, however, were demoralized. Before they had held out hope for a successful appeal; now they all faced long years in prison. Chaplin's poems lost their defiant quality and became more nostalgic. "For the first month," Chaplin recalled, "I had a poem published in the Leavenworth *New Era* each week, heavily colored with nostalgia."²⁶ One, written for his son and published in *New Era*, for example, read in part

The train, the lights, the engine's throb,
And that one stinging memory;
Your brave smile broken with a sob,
Your face pressed close to me....

I could not miss you more it seemed,
But now I don't know what to say.
It's harder than I ever dreamed
With you so far away.²⁷

During their first summer back, Chaplin was asked by *New Era* to paint a reproduction of *The Landing of William Penn* to illustrate an article about

Quakers. Warden W. I. Biddle liked the painting so much he appropriated it for his home. Word of this was leaked to Quakers in Philadelphia, who made such a stink that it was eventually returned to Chaplin. In revenge, Biddle stripped Chaplin of his writing privileges. These were reluctantly restored after Eugene Debs,* now out of the Atlanta prison, spoke out about Chaplin's mistreatment and urged that people write to the attorney general and the warden. Debs was doing a good turn for an old friend. In fact, while Chaplin remained in Leavenworth, Debs spent many evenings with Chaplin's wife, reassuring her that her husband would also soon be released.²⁸

As the 1920s opened, the Great Red Scare subsided and the Justice Department became more willing to forget the whole episode. The crusade to free the political prisoners grew, and Chaplin's book of prison poems brought him considerable publicity. In June 1923, President Harding signed commutation papers. Ashleigh was allowed to go free if he left the country and returned to his native England. Chaplin was released on the condition that he promise to remain law abiding and in no way encourage others to break the law.

"Charles Ashleigh was in tweeds again," wrote Chaplin of their release, "as dapper as you please on his way back to England."²⁹ Upon his return, Ashleigh went to work for the British *Daily Worker*, and true to the promise he made to Judge Landis he continued to work on behalf of the working class.

*During this epoch many newspapers were so stridently antilabor that this kind of news normally would not be printed.

*Debs's release from prison was lauded in New Era as "a truly judicious move on the part of Attorney General Daugherty and President Harding" (January 1922).

Chapter 10

The Rose Man of Sing Sing

DIED, after a painful illness of long duration, our esteemed friend, habitual nightmare and left leg annoyer, LOCK-STEP.... No wake and no flowers, please.

—Obituary notice in *Star of Hope*, August 25, 1900

Charles Chapin was once again his old autocratic self since the warden put him in charge of the *Sing Sing Bulletin*, the penitentiary's newspaper. His step quickened, his shoulders straightened, and as another observed, the gray-haired sixty-one-year-old editor was "czar once more, and he gloried in his power."¹ It had been more than a year since he had last sat behind a desk barking out orders to reporters. Now, as the spring of 1920 began to warm the cells of the damp prison by the Hudson River in Ossining, New York, he was once again behind a newspaperman's desk. But unlike his old job at Joseph Pulitzer's *Evening World*, he could no longer complain about not knowing the whereabouts of his reporters. "Reporters of our prison paper don't come down at irregular hours and sing the editor a song about a blockade in the subway," he said. "They are never called away by sickness in the family or to attend the funeral of a mythical grandmother. There are no besetting temptations to lure them from duty, no racetracks, no poker games, no cabarets, no wild women."²

Born in upstate New York, Chapin had almost always been a newspaperman, beginning his career at the age of fifteen. In 1889, Joseph Pulitzer lured Chapin away from Chicago, where he had become one of the highest-paid reporters, to New York to be his city editor first at the *Morning World*, later the *Evening World*. Over the next thirty years, as the *New York Times* put it, Chapin became "a figure of almost legendary proportions among newspapermen, not only in New York, but throughout America."³

Reporters at the *World* nicknamed Chapin “Hardboiled Charlie” and accused him of being a slave driver. “Tales told of him,” said the *New York Times*, “dealt with his czaristic dominance over the men in his city room, his ingenuity as an executive and now and again, his intolerance.”⁴ Chapin was known to fire a reporter for the slightest transgression of his rules, claiming once to have dismissed more than one hundred in his career. One tale that was told is that he even fired Pulitzer’s son, who was working as a reporter, for being away from his desk at his tailor’s when Chapin wanted to see him.



Perhaps New York's most famous newspaper editor, Charles Chapin spent the last dozen years of his life in Sing Sing after murdering his wife. In prison, he so animated the moribund prison newspaper that the state authorities shut it down. (Photo: Brown Brothers.)

Power is what Chapin loved, wrote Irvin Cobb, who worked under him before becoming a successful author. "Authority, the absolute despotism of a city editor's job, the divine right to hire and to fire, to punish and reward, to tell this one to do that and that one to do the other thing ... - these things were fragrant incenses for his personal altar fires."⁵ Chapin also loved two other things, money and his wife. It was his ruinous love of the former and his enigmatic love of the latter which brought an end to his career with the *World* and began his short but remarkable one as a prison journalist.

Chapin loved money-not to hoard it but to sustain his luxurious lifestyle. He maintained a yacht and a fancy automobile and always lived in hotels. Mostly, however, he needed money to pay for his gambling on speculative investments that regularly failed. To cover his losses he spent his inheritance from his rich Uncle Russell Sage, his wife's savings, and even securities that were entrusted to him. As brushes with financial disaster came increasingly closer he plotted to kill his wife and himself to "save" her from ruin.

Nellie Chapin had been his wife for thirty-five years when he grew to fear that he would be financially incapable of caring for her. She was often ill, and he believed she would not be able to manage without him, and more important, without his money. In 1915, after a series of disastrous losses on the stock market, he bought a plot and a gravestone for them during a trip to Washington, D.C. A friend who was a lawyer obtained a reprieve for Chapin from the depths of financial oblivion. But like a compulsive gambler, Chapin could not resist further speculation and was soon losing vast sums of money.

As the summer of 1918 came to a close, Chapin once again thought seriously about bringing an end to Nellie's life and his own. Walking out of their hotel one Sunday morning they noticed a woman beggar sitting on the curb. "Oh God!" murmured Nellie, "I wonder if I will ever come to that." The remark was meant as a casual observation, recalled Chapin, but "what she said cut into my heart like a knife stab." That Monday morning, he feared, his financial ruin would be known. "I knew," he said, "that within a few hours she would be almost as friendless and helpless as that poor creature.... There was only one way I could save her from such a fate."⁶

Early the next morning, using a gun loaned to him by Police Commissioner Waldo, he shot Nellie through the head while she slept. She

lived for another half hour, possibly longer. “I knelt by her side, her hand in mine, and prayed that God would understand and forgive,” wrote Chapin.⁷ After posting a Do Not Disturb sign on their hotel door he went to Central Park to complete the deed by killing himself. But he lost his nerve, and the following morning, after reading accounts of his wife’s murder in the newspapers; he walked into a nearby police station. There, before the astonished eyes of the officer in charge, he surrendered. In December, the court agreed to allow him to plead to a lesser charge of second-degree murder, and he was sentenced to serve twenty years to life in the notorious Sing Sing prison.

Chapin did not adjust well to his confinement. By December, his health failing, he was placed in the penitentiary’s hospital. There he met Lewis Lawes, who was visiting the prison while considering an offer to become its new warden. In January 1920, Lawes, who would later become one of the nation’s best-known wardens, accepted the appointment and returned to the prison hospital to see Chapin.

“He was almost too weak to answer my greeting,” recalled Lawes. “But his eyes still burned with life.”

“Charlie, how would you like to get out of bed?” asked Lawes. Chapin shook his head.

“I think I’ll put you to work, Charlie,” said Lawes ignoring Chapin’s protests.

“Something that I think you will like,” he continued. “You will be the editor of the *Bulletin*. ”⁸

Chapin recovered rapidly from his illness and soon moved his belongings into the *Bulletin*’s office. “I was delighted beyond expression to again breathe into my nostrils the smell of printer’s ink and hear the whiz and slam of the rotary press,” he wrote.⁹ The print shop was located on the ground floor of a large yellow building in the middle of the prison yard. In the center of the building, separated from the print shop by a screened arch, was a small alcove that Chapin took over. A large desk, with a typewriter at its side, took up most of the space. Cabinets lined the walls where Chapin stored a large supply of canned foods and delicacies supplied by his friends on the outside. Edward McGrath, another inmate of Sing Sing, recalled watching Chapin unpack the boxes of goodies. “With the opening of each one, the place looked more and more like a grocery store,” he said. “There were cans of fruit, cans of vegetables, jars of jams, jellies and preserves,

boxes of crackers, sugar, tea, coffee — everything that a man could possibly need.”¹⁰

“No editor out of prison that I have known has an office so attractive,” admitted Chapin.¹¹ But the luxury he reserved for himself angered inmates as his callousness at the *World* had produced wholesale hatred (and fear) of him. “The print-shop squad resented Chapin with a whole-hearted resentment,” said McGrath. “They resented his lack of friendliness, they resented the air of suspicion with which he regarded all his fellow prisoners. They resented it particularly when he loaded his new cabinet with his choicest viands and proceeded to place a heavy brass padlock on its hinged door.”¹²

Nonetheless, Chapin went to work to breathe new life into the prison newspaper. Resentment from those around him had never bothered him before, and it would not now. With sunlight streaming in from two windows on each side of his office, Chapin worked each day from seven in the morning until he returned to his cell at ten in the evening. “Chapin thrived in his work,” said Lawes. “He found renewed interest in life. He was a man made over.”¹³

A prison newspaper had been published regularly at Sing Sing since before the turn of the century but in recent years had become mediocre at best. The *Bulletin* was an amalgam of two previous prison newspapers, the *Star of Hope* and the *Bulletin* of the Mutual Welfare League. Over the years, the two had merged into the *Star-Bulletin*, and in 1920, the name was changed to the *Sing Sing Bulletin*.

Unknown to the various editors of the *Star*, *Bulletin*, *Star-Bulletin*, and *Sing Sing Bulletin*, their efforts in prison journalism had been preceded by an earlier attempt at the penitentiary. In 1887, Gay Foster, an inmate serving time for defrauding a contractor, had published a small illustrated magazine called *Solitaire*. Its first issue was fourteen pages long, half of which were filled with illustrations printed from cuts engraved by Foster on maple wood. “To produce it,” noted the *New York World*, “long hours of painstaking care and skill were required on the part of a man who is - as he expressed it - ‘dead by the law of man, yet speaketh.’”¹⁴

Except for an article in the *World*, little is known about Foster’s magazine. It seemed to have been only the product of one inmate’s interest and made little effort to chronicle life at Sing Sing. “A strong religious sentiment characterized most of the reader material,” said the *World*. The masthead on

the editorial page informed the reader that the “journal was strictly devoted to Christianity.” Furthermore it advised potential advertisers, even though it was unlikely many would be interested in taking out advertising space, that “no quack doctors, no lottery drawings or other bogus schemes will be advertised in this paper at any price.”¹⁵ The illustrations, which were apparently done by Foster, were clearly the work of someone with great talent. One of them, a depiction of an inmate in stripes titled “Untamed,” used deep shading and clean lines to produce a sinister character of an unrepentant inmate. Most of his drawings were allegorical, representing, as the *World* noted, “the wiles and snares which tempt men and lead them behind prison bars.”¹⁶

It is not known what happened to Foster and his little magazine. By 1899 when the *Star of Hope*, the forerunner of Chapin’s paper, was established there was no trace of Foster’s efforts. The *Star* was established, like many other prison newspapers, because of the introduction of the printing press into the prison. But unlike at Elmira Reformatory and more like at the Minnesota State Prison, it seems the initiative was taken by an inmate known only as No. 1500. The new printing plant, he recalled in his memoirs, “attract[ed] my own longing gaze every time I marched by it, which was some half-dozen times a day. If I only had that plant up state somewhere, I used to say to myself, what a happy activity for myself I could create!”¹⁷

Finally the idea took shape in his mind that he might be able to publish a newspaper right there at the prison. “I had never heard of prison journalism,” he admitted, “although I knew that in Stillwater, Minnesota, a little sheet called the *Prison Mirror* was published weekly ... so I set to work to frame up a prospectus of what I thought a prison journal might be.” And thus he came to suggest to the warden that an eight-page paper of material written by the inmates about Sing Sing with some news of the outside be printed biweekly in the new plant. “As for its staff, I offered myself as editor and publisher and the whole community of prisoners as its corps of contributors,” recalled No. 1500.¹⁸



Many inmates used the skills they acquired in their previous careers when put to work on the prison newspaper. The plate for the masthead from Sing Sing's *Star of Hope* (November 1, 1902, issue) was reportedly etched by notorious forger Francis Quigley.

With the permission of the warden and the general superintendent of the prisons, the *Star of Hope* was first published on April 22, 1899. Its nameplate was etched by Francis Quigley, one of the country's more notorious counterfeiters. It depicted the countryside beyond the walls and a star hovering above one of the guard towers of the prison. The first issues were such a success that by July the paper's coverage and circulation were extended to include other nearby state prisons, including one for women. "Editors were appointed at each of the institutions," said No. 1500, "and prison journalism became an established factor in the state."¹⁹

The impression the new paper created among the prison officials was one of horror and alarm with the exception of the warden and the superintendent, said No. 1500. "Of all things that a prison keeper fears, nothing is so terrible as the newspaper." Their fears, however, were groundless. The *Star of Hope* was no crusading advocate of inmate rights or muckraking journal. As No. 1500 admitted, the *Star* "was subjected, in large measure, to prison discipline, and could, by no means, be out of accord with the administration." For instance, in an issue of the *Star* in the fall of 1899, No. 1500 reported that the superintendent of prisons desired that the paper discourage the writing of articles critical of the courts. "We, as inmates of penal institutions," wrote No. 1500, "are in no position to criticize the actions of the courts, and this paper was not established for any such purpose."²⁰

Official restrictions on the paper did not dampen the interest among inmates. In its first four years, reports No. 1500, 5,160 submissions were received. The paper's restrained tone also made the paper increasingly popular with reformers outside of the prison and other prison officials, many of whom subscribed to other prison newspapers. In October of 1900, the superintendent of the New York prisons said that issues of the now-sixteen-page-long tabloid were shown at the Paris exposition over the summer. "And I am informed by one of the New York State Commissioners," said the superintendent, "that the authorities in charge of the French prisons were so impressed with its value as an educational medium that they decided to issue a like paper in their prisons."²¹

Thus by the time Chapin was appointed editor of the *Sing Sing Bulletin* in 1920, prison journalism had become an established part of life behind the walls of Sing Sing and at least two-thirds of America's prisons. In the eyes of the authorities, the success of the *Summary* in Elmira, New York, and similar papers had convinced officials that a prison paper could serve them well in their efforts to reform their wards. Prison officials believed, as many others did before the invention of broadcasting, that the press was one of the most influential and powerful forces in society. The press was considered so influential that many officials believed it could actually inspire crime as others would later argue that television fostered violence. "No treatment of crime," noted a New York official at the 1886 American Prison Congress, "by the press is wholesome or legitimate which appeals to the baser instincts and passions of men, and which, therefore, familiarizes them with its methods and instrumentalities, without exciting and confirming their natural abhorrence of the motives which inspire and the actions which embody it."²² But tamed and kept under a tight leash, a newspaper published inside a prison, believed officials, could be put to their use.

The view of a prison paper as an instrument of reform was still the accepted reason for their existence when Chapin moved into the *Bulletin's* office. But in part because of the success of some newspapers like Stillwater's *Prison Mirror*, some officials had come to believe that prison papers should be left more to their own to report the news. News will circulate in a prison no matter what, Orville Kiplinger, a prison chaplain, told the 1915 American Prison Congress. "Would it not be for the better to let the men have accurate reports as published in the press than to feed their minds on reports that creep among them in details so lurid and colored that

the yellowest sensational Police Gazette account would read like a Sunday School paper in comparison?" Prisoners long for a prison newspaper that will give them all the worthwhile news or an uncensored newspaper from the outside, rather than the sanitized copy of a severely bridled prison publication, continued the chaplain. And, said Kiplinger, "when a prison guard, or an official, or a warden's wife is killed why not let the plain facts come in rather than a garbled sensational account?"²³

It's unclear if many officials, or any for that matter, agreed with Kiplinger. But his appeal did signal the beginning of the decline in the view held by officials and reformers that a prison newspaper was simply one of their tools of reform. By 1916 many prisons allowed inmates to subscribe to daily and weekly newspapers without any restrictions, creating competition for the prison newspapers. At the same time, however, there was a limit to what prison officials would tolerate, as Chapin and his *Sing Sing Bulletin* found out.

It was in this changing atmosphere in 1920 that Charles Chapin began his new career as editor of a prison newspaper. Immediately upon taking over the newspaper, Chapin, with the support of the warden, instituted a number of changes. The paper was rechristened the *Sing Sing Bulletin* and was enlarged to twice its former size. A new typeface was obtained to distinguish it from its predecessors. "Warden Lawes," wrote Chapin in the first issue, "believes the *Bulletin* should be the leading prison publication and has promised to back it to the full extent of his resources."²⁴ Inmates were urged to contribute to the "new" prison paper which would serve only Sing Sing. Writing under the pseudonym Man in the Library, Chapin told his readers "what other men have accomplished under worse conditions should be an incentive to every inmate of Sing Sing to at least make an effort to write something worth while for our prison paper. Writing will help us forget our misery."²⁵

Almost immediately the *Bulletin* became an advocate for the inmates. In its second issue under Chapin's tutelage, for instance, the paper pushed for increased pay for guards to insure more competent (and thus, one hopes, less dangerous) keepers. The paper also began to devote space to interpreting court decisions important to prisoners. In succeeding issues the *Bulletin* joined other prison newspapers in campaigning for increased-or in some cases any-wages for convict labor. "The state hasn't discharged its duty to society," wrote Chapin, "when it does nothing to correct evil-doers but

confine them behind prison walls and embitter them by compulsory work without compensation.”²⁶

The most evident change in Sing Sing’s newspaper was that it began to reflect the aggressive, abrasive, and sometimes arrogant personality of its new editor. Chapin slowly gave up on the idea of having inmates write most of the articles. Their work, apparently, was not up to his standards. By the fall of his first year of running the *Bulletin*, he was writing almost the entire paper by himself, “covering my identity,” he explained to a friend, “by such delightful pen names as ‘The Lifer,’ ‘Bill the Burglar,’ ‘The Man in the Library,’ ‘Jerry the Monk,’ and whatever absurd name may pop into my mind at the moment.”²⁷

Warden Lawes gave Chapin as much latitude as he felt he possibly could. “Frequently he chafed under institutional restrictions,” recalled Lawes. “Having his editorial censored was something new to a man of Chapin’s temperament. As Warden that was my duty, and I fulfilled it literally.” But Lawes was very liberal and rarely suggested any changes. Without his interference Chapin had “built up a prison paper second to none in the country,” he said.²⁸

The *Bulletin* also became increasingly popular reading with visitors to the prison and liberal New Yorkers. In fact, boasted Chapin, the paper had become so popular with the mail clerks alone that “many [issues] we send out never reach the ones to whom they are addressed.”²⁹ Nonetheless, Chapin did not forget for whom he was publishing the paper. In a letter to one of his admirers outside of prison, Chapin apologized for the simplicity of his newspaper. “Please remember it is not writing for intellects such as yours. A prison editor must not soar above the dwarfed and shriveled minds of his readers,” he wrote.³⁰ On the other hand, despite the implications of this letter, he was never patronizing. The *Bulletin*’s style was simple but never childish like that of the *Summary* in Elmira. In fact, Chapin believed that he had reserved the best of his ability for the small newspaper, commenting once that an editorial he wrote on capital punishment was one of the finest things he had ever penned.

“One hasn’t much to write about where four walls crowd so close,” complained Chapin after settling into his new job.³¹ So, he applied himself to writing about his life for the paper. The idea was an immediate success, especially among the prisoners who regarded him as a kind of local eccentric. But it also rankled officials in Albany, who had been watching,

with growing wariness, the increasing visibility of Chapin's paper. They now complained that the *Bulletin* was becoming the voice of Chapin and not the convicts. Charles Rattigan, superintendent of the prisons, ordered that the circulation of the *Bulletin* be cut. In April 1921, an announcement on the front page of the paper unconvincingly explained that in order to "economize," the paper would be restricted to 1,500 copies per run, its normal number having been around 5,000 copies. "After this issue the mailing list will be practically eliminated," continued the announcement. Even worse was the news that support from outside the prison would no longer be possible because "the law forbids us to accept subscriptions."³²

Ignoring the not-too-subtle hints coming from Albany, Chapin decided that if his reminiscences were popular with the inmates, he would enlist another memoir writer. Unfortunately, he chose Charlie Wilson, a bigamist. "On the outside were seven women vowing adoration, and swearing fealty. Wilson had married them all," explained writer Eleanor Early. "Now for his sins and his loving heart, he was doing time."³³

In May, Wilson told his story in the *Bulletin*. "They say a good wife is a rare jewel. I have been a collector of jewels," he wrote. But, he admitted, he had some regrets. "I am doing five and a half for collecting my string of jewels. They were not worth the price." The prison readers may have chuckled, but for officials in Albany this was the last straw.

A few months later visitors to Sing Sing seeking copies of the *Bulletin* were told by the warden that he had received orders to discontinue the newspaper. The suppression order, according to the *New York Times*, "brought a storm of protest."³⁴ B. Ogden Chisolm, a noted prison reformer from New York, fired off a letter to governor Smith saying he regarded the stopping of the publication as an "outrage" and demanded that the Governor allow it to resume.³⁵ Two days later Rattigan denied that he had ever ordered the paper closed and promised to investigate the whole episode. Rattigan finally confirmed that the Wilson article and Chapin's memoirs had prompted a meeting with Lawes. He explained to the *New York Times* that his action resulted "in no appearance of the *Bulletin* this month, and in the fight that now is being waged, not only to restore the *Bulletin* to its former activities as a prison newspaper, but also to settle whether or not it is to be edited in Albany or Sing Sing." In the meeting Rattigan said he ordered Lawes to fire Chapin and submit proofs of each future issue to Albany or else suspend publication.³⁶

The state prison commissioners said they understood the superintendent had not actually specifically ordered the suppression of the paper and they wanted it to resume publication. Rattigan, Lawes, and members of the commission agreed to let the *Bulletin* begin publishing again with Chapin as its editor, claiming to have ironed out their differences. Coming out of their meeting, one official told reporters that the paper “will be carefully edited and censored.”

“Edited and censored here or at Albany?” asked a reporter.

“Here,” replied the official.³⁷

On August 25 the *New York Times* reported that “the print shop at Sing Sing is working overtime tonight in hope of running the August number of the *Sing Sing Bulletin* off the press before the month ends.” Governor Smith also traveled south to look into the matter. He said he was assured that Rattigan had never actually ordered the *Bulletins* suppression. “I shall have a talk with Warden Lawes,” said the Governor, “and that will end the matter, I believe.”³⁸ It did not. Seven months later, Warden Lawes announced that there was no more state money to print the paper. What Rattigan could not do outright he accomplished through fiscal means. Friends could not help, either. It would be useless to raise funds to defray the cost of getting out the paper, explained Lawes, because the state was prohibited from accepting money.

Chapin knew he was licked. More than a dozen offers came in to supply the needed materials for the paper to continue publishing, but he accepted none of them. “I would prefer to shovel coal,” he told a friend, “rather than edit a prison paper that existed solely by the generosity of men who take a kindly interest in it. If the state cannot supply the funds to buy the necessary material, I would have no heart in trying to carry on.”³⁹

The end of the paper was a blow for Chapin. At the height of his fifteen months as its editor he had written to a friend that “I am making of our little paper something of far greater importance to me than anything I have ever done. In doing it I am keeping myself occupied and thus able to make the days and months, and even the years, move swiftly along.”⁴⁰

“Again he began to droop,” recalled Lawes. “He walked through the yard with a lagging step. A man just turned sixty, a failing body, a brain still active and willing, faced with years and years of endless nothingness. I was convinced that we would have to find a task well suited for his driving powers or he would again take to his bed.”⁴¹ Then one day, Chapin appeared

before Lawes and asked to be assigned to care of the small lawn in the prison yard. A year later, after perusing a two-year-old florist catalog, Chapin sought permission to start a flower garden while the warden was out in the yard. Lawes looked around the yard. It was barren - nothing but dirt and debris. He then looked across the Hudson River at the green, rolling hills. "Suddenly I was ashamed. I turned to the slim man at my side. 'Tell you what, Charlie. Do the whole job. Put some life into this yard. Cover it up. Let's have a real garden, trees and flowers.'"⁴²

That winter Chapin studied a multivolume set of the methods, discoveries, and applications of Luther Burbank, the famed Californian botanist. In the spring 1922, he was assigned a crew and the grounds were prepared for planting. After ordering a few plants from a nearby nursery, the owner of the establishment came to Sing Sing to see what was being done with his plants. Upon discovering Chapin's plan, he donated a truckload of more plants. A philanthropist got wind of the idea and donated even more plants. Over the next year or two, word of Chapin's garden spread. After the *New York Times* ran an item, Chapin's old friend Irvin Cobb was assigned to do an article for *Cosmopolitan*. By 1925 Chapin was again in the public eye, but this time, as Cobb wrote, for being "the convict who made a garden on the road to Hell."⁴³

The publicity caused men and women from as far away as Australia and South Africa to donate plants, especially roses. The rubble and debris of Sing Sing's prison yard turned into a marvel unlike that of any prison in the world. A little over an acre in size, it was broken up into a series of beds and borders filled with roses, peonies, geraniums, and gladiolus. Benches were interspersed along the paths, and water spurted from a ten-foot cement fountain at the center. In 1926, a birdhouse was added to house exotic birds donated by well-wishers.

The inmates were grateful for the garden even though they continued to begrudge the extra privileges Chapin enjoyed, such as his office (where the *Bulletin* had been published), a separate cell in an unused portion of the prison, and his being exempted from wearing a uniform. Chapin, who had spent most of his life within the smell and sound of a printing press, now spent his days, at age 67, with fragrant flowers and singing birds. Instead of being called Hard-boiled Charlie, as his reporters at the *World* used to refer to him, the inmates called him the Rose Man.

In 1930, a new drainage system for the prison was installed. Unaware of the significance of the garden, with a steam shovel the contractor callously dug large trenches across Chapin's rose garden, leaving his best rosebushes uprooted and dying. "Chapin looked sorrowfully on this carnage, but he was helpless. His province was being laid waste," recalled Lawes. "I think it affected him deeply. He was never the same."⁴⁴ A few weeks later he entered the prison hospital. That fall he wasted away, and on December 13, 1922, he died. Lawes, who was visibly affected by Chapin's death when he appeared before reporters at the gates of Sing Sing, said he did not know much about Chapin's newspaper career outside of the prison. "But in all his life," Lawes said, "he could not have done as much to alleviate human suffering and help humanity as he has done here in the last twelve years. While he was physically in prison he was mentally never in prison." A few days later, following Chapin's last wishes, he was buried next to his wife in Washington, D.C.

Chapter 11

Harelike Growth

I've heard some people say "Procrastination is the thief of time." Ifso, I hope it'll steal away About two years of mine.

— *Good Words*, circa 1937

In the early 1970s, it was said that occasionally the whistle of a Southern Pacific train could still be heard from inside the Oregon State Penitentiary in Salem. Train engineers began to blow their engine's whistle in 1927 while passing the prison to remind the DeAutremont brothers, doing time inside, that their bloody holdup of the Shasta Limited had not been forgotten. By 1961, however, the brothers were no longer in the prison. One had died, another had been committed to the state's mental institution, and the third had been paroled. So usually the trains passed by silently, but sometimes, out of habit, an older engineer would reach for the whistle's cord.

The DeAutremonts' holdup in October of 1923 was, in the words of the *Oregon Journal*, "the boldest train robbery since the days of the Old West."¹ It was followed by one of the largest manhunts ever conducted in the Northwest. But it was not until 1927 that the three brothers were rounded up and sent to the state prison. There they faced a lifetime of confinement for their deed while still in their twenties.

Hugh DeAutremont, the youngest brother, was unwilling to simply fall into the routine of prison life, and instead, after being assigned to work in the print shop, became interested in writing. He enrolled in writing and English courses offered in the prison through the University of Oregon. In 1935 he went to work on a plan to put his newly acquired skills to use. He convinced Warden James Lewis that the prison should have a monthly magazine. The costs would be low, he argued, as prisoners would do all the writing, editing,

and printing. Further, he claimed that some money could be made by selling advertisements in the new publication.

With convicted forger Clyde Spinning as art editor, a sports editor, and a business manager, Hugh DeAutremont brought out the first edition of the *Shadows* in February of 1936. “The well-printed, ably illustrated first issue carries short fiction, radio and sports news,” reported *Newsweek*.² The editorial, written by DeAutremont, took aim at the *Portland Oregonian* for not supporting a Christmastime parole scheme. *Shadows* sold for ten cents a copy and featured a modest amount of advertising, mostly from funeral parlors, drugstores, and jewelers. Profits from the advertisements were set aside for renting movies and purchasing sporting goods for the inmates. Within a year it had a circulation of six hundred, half of which was outside the prison. Because Lewis saw little need to censor the new magazine — a privilege denied most inmate-editors — *Shadows* quickly became a favorite among inmate-journalists around the country.

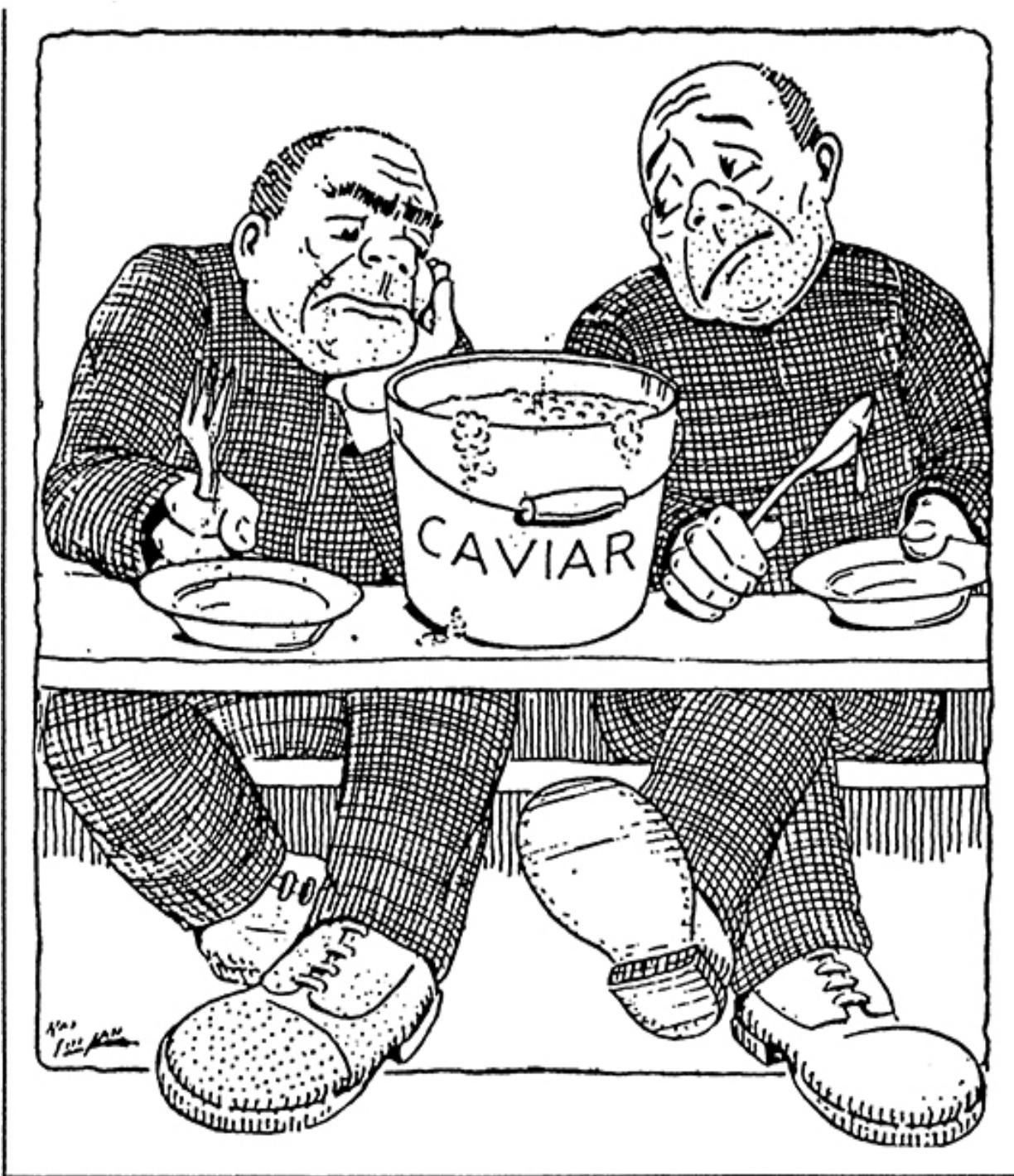
In 1936 and 1937, for instance, *Shadows* won the Gries Award, an inmate-journalist-administered competition of prison publications sponsored by Walter F. Gries, a former warden of the State House of Correction and Branch Prison, in Marquette, Michigan. Frank Morrison of the *Atlantian* called DeAutremont the dean of prison journalism. “Though more renowned for his satirical invective than for more amiable capacities, the Sage of Salem is a powerful worker in the vineyard for penal reforms,” wrote Morrison. “His copy always makes delightful reading and even his talented invective is blended with a species of whimsy that somehow makes the vitriol palatable.”³

The *Shadows*, though, was not without its detractors. Following the publication of its first issue, the district attorney for Jackson County, where the DeAutremont brothers had been tried, told the Associated Press that the *Shadows* “is a distinct menace” and urged that its circulation be confined to the prison. “It offers,” he said, “an opportunity for inmates to get messages to the outside world that might result in serious difficulties.”⁴

But, as the administration’s support for the *Shadows* illustrated, the district attorney’s attitude was no longer as widely shared by prison officials as it had been in the past. Prison periodicals like the *Shadows*, were being started with increasing frequency. The Oregon magazine was, in fact, only the most recent entry into an increasingly crowded field of prison journals. By 1936, when *Shadows* first appeared, almost half of the prisons in the United States

possessed an inmate publication, half of which had been launched within the preceding four years, according to a study conducted by Isabella Kellock Coulter that year. Specifically, she contacted all 266 federal and state penal institutions and found that 103 had prison newspapers or magazines. Fifteen prisons reported that they hoped to start a publication in the near future.⁵

Most all of the prison publications that Coulter studied reported extensive circulation outside the prison. The size of the circulation beyond the prisons ranged from two publications that had between eight thousand and nine thousand outside readers and thirteen with twenty-five to one hundred. In all, she found, that more than fifty thousand copies of the penal press reached readers outside of the prisons. As one would expect, almost all the wardens, superintendents, chaplains, and prison editors who replied to Coulter's survey reported that the publications were censored by the warden or an appointed official. Among the items that many wardens said they would not permit to be published included condemnation or praise of prison officials; news of crime, criminals, prison life, or prison riots; religious material with a sectarian angle; politics; and jokes at the expense of any race, religion, or person.⁶ Censorship remained an unchallenged prerogative at this time. For example, E. B. Swope, a prison librarian speaking at the seventieth annual congress of the American Correctional Association in 1940, said, "Most of us as individuals believe it necessary and justifiable to censor any material that passes through the prisoners' hands."⁷



In the August 1933 issue of the *San Quentin Bulletin*, an inmate artist pokes fun at the public's belief that prisoners were living in comparative luxury during the Great Depression.

The depression years, for whatever reason, were growth years for prison journalism. Prison librarian Herman Spector found the same surge in the

number of prison publications that Coulter had uncovered. Spector wrote that it was between the years of 1930 and 1934 “when the public had other worries than the coddling of prisoners, that with almost harelite frequency forty-five more institutions produced magazines.” However, Spector placed the number of inmate publications at 127 in 1935, twenty-five percent higher than Coulter.⁸

Even in Texas, a state not regarded for progressive penal policies, inmates had a prison newspaper. The *Huntsville Item*, of January 24, 1929, reported that

the third issue of “The Echo,” prison paper published by the inmates of the state penitentiary and sponsored by the officials, will be out Friday. Its purpose is to advocate betterment of conditions within the walls, educate the men, and habilitate them for return to the “outside.”⁹

The early days of the *Echo* did indeed assist two inmates’ return to the outside, albeit for only a short time. On October 21, 1929, a pair of inmate-editors were brought to the offices of the *Huntsville Item* where they set type for the *Echo*. After a couple of hours of work, one of the inmates hit the supervising guard over the head with a heavy wooden mallet. They then fled in a stolen Chevrolet coupe but were captured within an hour.¹⁰

Aside from garnering press by means of daring escapes, the inmate-editors were also attracting considerable attention for their work in the 1930s. *Newsweek*, *Literary Digest*, and a number of academic journals began to take an interest in the penal press. Readers of *Newsweek*, for instance, learned about Hugh DeAutremont’s new career, Charles Chapin’s short-lived editorship of the *Sing Sing Bulletin*, and other noted prison journalists such as William J. Mahoney, editor of the *Ohio Penitentiary News*.

He has some of the short-story flair of a one-time Ohio prisoner, William Sidney Porter - O. Henry. Mahoney writes from 5 to 9 each night, and has contributed to *Prison Life Stories*, *Thrilling Western*, *Underworld*, and other pulp magazines.¹¹

Mahoney’s reputation among inmates was not restricted to his editorship of the *OP-News*, as it was called. Before coming to the state penitentiary he had served as editor of the *London Prison Farmer*, published at Ohio’s London Prison Farm. A weekly available to subscribers at seventy-five cents a year, the *Farmer* was a hit with inmate-journalists. “Truly this is a bargain in belles-lettres,” wrote the *Atlantian’s* Morrison. “To write for the *Farmer* is to make the slicks,’ the goal of writers, for the L.P.F. is extravagantly (but not

inappropriately) published on beautiful slick-surfaced paper, the mere touch of which arouses our lower nature. Very *Saturday Evening Posrish!*"¹²

In Illinois, the biweekly *Menard Time*, which was among the two dozen prison papers that began publishing in 1934, had a circulation of two thousand within a few years.¹³ It was the creation of Warden Joseph E. Ragan, who wanted to launch an instructional program in printing at the Menard branch of the Illinois State Prison. He recruited John A. File, the publisher of the Chester *Herald-Tribune*, and allocated five hundred dollars for the purchase of type and an ancient used press.

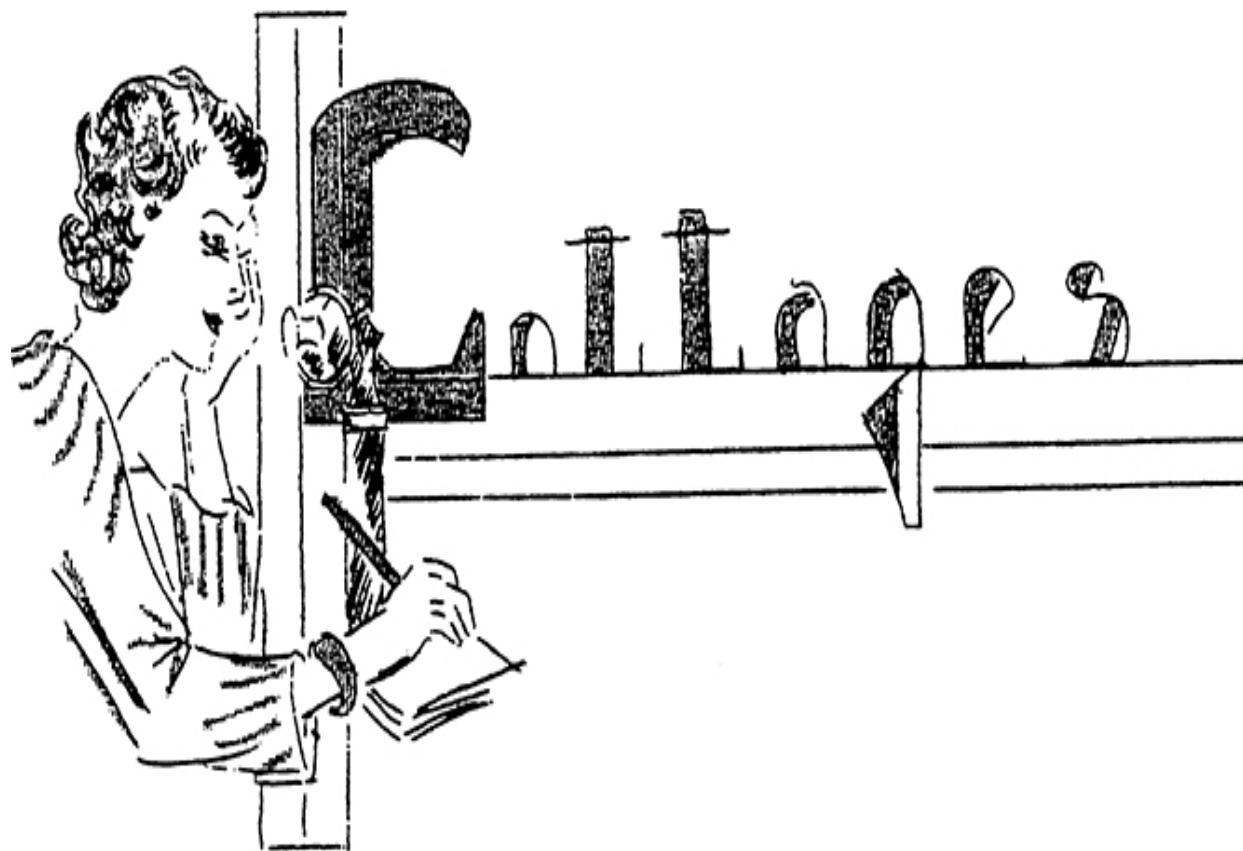
Meanwhile, to the north of Menard, Pate Holt and Larry Hevey, inmates of the Iowa State Penitentiary at Fort Madison, gained permission from Warden Glenn Hayes to begin publishing a monthly magazine. Permission, however, was contingent on the pair's obtaining funding, as the state was in no position to provide support in the midst of the Great Depression, said Hayes. Holt and Hevey launched a campaign to obtain advance sales and solicited funds from firms that did business with the state. The response was heartening. Hayes dug into his own pocket to buy a subscription, as did many guards. Even members of the public who heard of the plan sent in money. "But mainly, our beginning was made possible by the inmates themselves," recalled Hevey. "They saw the need for a representative prison magazine - one willing to fight for better prison conditions."¹⁴

Using the only typeface available in the prison, 12-point, the inmates set the type for the first issue entirely by hand. They were so short of type that Holt and Hevey had to set one section and wait for it to come off the press before setting the next. Called the *Presidio*, the magazine's premier issue appeared in March 1934. The diminutive publication, only five and a half by seven and a half inches in size, grandly announced its mission:

This broad purpose is, first: to foster and encourage the development of expres-sional talents among the men. Secondly: to provide you with a medium that permits the publication of the news of your community - this prison. Thirdly: to amuse and entertain you with timely articles, interesting stories, poems and jokes. All such material representing, in the main, the efforts of your fellow inmates.¹⁵

Reaction to the *Presidio* came from around the state. Newspapers in Cedar Rapids, Burlington, and nearby Fort Madison wrote about Holt and Hevey's effort, bringing forth a flood of subscribers. "The brothers of the Fourth Estate recognized a new star beckoning desperately for attention," said Hevey.¹⁶

Perhaps inspired by the commercial success of the *Presidio* and *Shadows*, inmates at the Idaho State Penitentiary, in Boise, began publishing the *Wall City Bulletin* in January 1939. Printing was financed by the Prison Library Fund, which raised its funds from collecting a twenty-five cent fee for public tours of the prison. Like *Shadows*, the *Wall City Bulletin* solicited and obtained advertisements from local merchants. Unfortunately for the publication, this idea did not meet with the approval of the Boise Chamber of Commerce. It objected, wrote editor L. R. Moore, "giving as their reasons that we were unfair competition to the legitimate advertising agencies of Boise."



Several pages of the January 1936 edition of the *Eagle*, the most prominent prison publication produced by female inmates, was devoted to gossip-like news from the various "cottages" at the Federal Reformatory for Women in Alderson, West Virginia.

This has been a sore spot with us for several months. Perhaps they did not know the status of our paper.

The *Wall City Bulletin* is not state owned. It is strictly a convict paper....With the cost of our paper, our circulation is too small to make it self-sufficient, making a steady drain on our Library Fund.¹⁷

The *Bulletin* ceased publishing in December after bringing out only eleven issues, according to Mary Ellen Sloth, who researched the history of prison journalism in Idaho. More than seven years would pass before another inmate publication would be published at the Idaho State Penitentiary, she said.¹⁸

The first publications at women's prisons seem to have begun in the 1930s. The records of early attempts to create prison publications among women inmates are sketchy at best. But by 1942 when a student at the University of Wisconsin conducted a survey of prisons, there were between eight and ten women-inmate publications. Two of the publications were printed; the remainder were mimeographed. At several of the prisons officials served as editors-in-chief.¹⁹ This was not inconsistent with the treatment of female offenders. Women offenders, of whom there were very few, were regarded very differently from male criminals. "The women's prisons established in the 1870s and 1880s set standards that survived almost intact for the next century," said Estelle B. Freedman, author of *Their Sisters' Keepers: Women Prison Reform in America, 1830-1930*.

"Differential treatment of women prisoners remained a central principle of American corrections until a new feminist approach emerged in the 1970s."²⁰ For example, at the Federal Reformatory for Women, which opened in Alderson, West Virginia, in 1927, women were offered training only in home hygiene, office work, and farming. The authors of a survey conducted the year the new federal reformatory opened concluded that most industrial work such as printing was unsuitable for women ("Printing is a man's industry").²¹

It was, however, apparently at Alderson that the first women's-prison publication, the *Eagle*, was started in November of 1933. A few of the other women's prisons followed Alderson's example. The State Reformatory for Women in Shakopee, Minnesota, launched the *Reflector* in 1935. The Atlantian s Morrison, writing in a style for which he would have been severely chastized today, declared himself a fan of the *Reflector*. "Lucile is the editor and takes a strangely unfeminine attitude of pragmatism toward the problems she editorializes. Other contributions are good and reflect a

wholesome attitude on the part of the officials toward the girls there, and vice versa.”²²

As the 1940s opened, the prison press had become an integral part of the majority of American prisons. The pages of its many representatives maintained a boisterous attitude about their craft. Almost all publications reserved a page, sometimes several, for exchanges among themselves. Sometimes the editors used the space to reprint work from other prison papers, other times to comment on each others work. The exchange pages certainly gave the editors a sense of community as they used them to send messages back and forth across the country, a sort of prison-to-prison telegraph service. For instance, the following are two samples of such communications from the March 1942 *Menard Time*:

Shadows: Howdy, Hugh! What about a little trip to Cab-caban, San lose, or Pawawna, Hugh? The rock certainly seems to be catching hell right now. They could use us rascals over there, couldn’t they?

Atlantian: ... We hope that Red has finally left your portals, and that he doesn’t have to arrive at ours. He deserves a break.²³

The next month, however, the *Menard Time* sent another kind of message to its readers. Stapled inside the April issue was a note from the warden. “Due to the present emergency and curtailment of all unecessary programs together with the conservation of all materials, the publication of the prison publication *Menard Time*, is to be discontinued until further notice.”²⁴

The *Menard Time* was only one of forty-two prison publications that would become casualties of World War II. “The war years,” wrote Spector in 1945, “gave to the more crotchety and unconvinced administrators the excuses they needed to kill paper after paper, until today, of the three hundred national and state penal and correctional institutions in the United States, only eighty-five sponsor publications.”²⁵ Aside from Spector, *Saturday Review* editor J. T. Winterich was the only member of the free press to protest the closing of the prison papers. “Only the most cynical, disillusioned and hard-boiled of officialdom, one would think, would take such drastic action,” wrote Winterich. “Freedom of the press, however controlled (and controlled, preferably, by an intelligent staff of inmate editors), is one freedom which should still be permitted to flourish in a place which is itself the negation of freedom.”²⁶

Ironically, while officials claimed that paper shortages and other supplies forced them to inflict the death penalty on a third of the prison publications, no such problem seemed to exist in the new prisons that were being built to incarcerate prisoners of war and American citizens whose loyalty was wrongly challenged.

Chapter 12

Chronicling Wrongful Imprisonment

Right or wrong, justice or injustice, our being placed in here is a bitter mystery. The wound that was inflicted upon us is still deep and fresh. Let TIME be trusted to heal us all.

—*Poston Chronicle*, January 1, 1944,
Poston War Relocation Camp,
Poston, Arizona

On the desert floor below the eastern face of California's craggy Sierra Nevada, a 560-acre prison, surrounded by barbed wire and watchtowers with machine guns and searchlights, took shape during the spring and summer of 1942. Hurriedly, builders erected rows and rows of wooden barracks, using quarter-inch boards and tar paper for walls and roofs, as cars, buses, and trucks carrying 10,271 Japanese-Americans made their way down what had been a rarely used Inyo County dirt road. Within months they had built the largest city between Los Angeles and Reno.¹

The Manzanar War Relocation Center, as the new prison was called, was the first often such concentration camps built that year by the federal government to confine more than one hundred thousand Americans of Japanese descent in barren, remote spots of Arkansas, Arizona, California, Colorado, Wyoming and Utah. It had been less than six months since the Japanese bombed Pearl Harbor, and the government was forcibly removing all Japanese-Americans from the West Coast, claiming that their racial ties to their former country made it dangerous to let them remain in their homes and at large. Two-thirds of those confined to Manzanar were first-generation American citizens called in Japanese *Nisei*. A few were *Sansei*, second-generation Americans. The remainder, almost a third, were resident aliens, called *Issei*, all of whom had been in the United States since 1924 when its borders were closed to Japanese immigrants.²

They were trapped both by the racial hysteria that engulfed the nation following Pearl Harbor and by their incapacity to prove their loyalty in any manner satisfactory to the nation. General John L. DeWitt, who supervised the relocation of Japanese-Americans, suggested that the law-abiding nature of these citizens actually made them untrustworthy. “The very fact that no sabotage has taken place to date is a disturbing and confirming indication that such action will be taken,” he wrote to Secretary of War Henry Stimson.³ Thus, beginning in March 1942, thousands of American citizens, without being charged of a single crime, were imprisoned. By November, 106,770 Japanese-Americans found themselves locked away for the duration of the war.

Rather than despair, the internees made the best they could of their confinement. They drew strength from their cultural traditions. “Our obligation to ourselves is to wrest the nearest possible approximation of normalcy out of an abnormal situation,” wrote an editorial writer on the *Minidoka Irrigator*, a camp newspaper at the Jerome County internment camp in Idaho. “Our future will be what we make it; and there is no reason to despair.”⁴

Ansel Adams visited Manzanar, coming from Yosemite National Park where he worked as a photographer, and made a photographic record of life in the camp that he published in a book called *Born Free and Equal* in 1944.* He was struck by the sense of community he found among the inmates.

From the harsh soil they have extracted fine crops; they have made gardens glow in the firebreaks and between the barracks. Out of the jostling, dusty confusion of the first bleak days in raw barracks they have modulated to a democratic internal society and a praiseworthy personal adjustment to conditions beyond their control.⁵

In each camp, the spirit Adams found in Manzanar could be seen in the rapidity by which internees established a prison press. Internees in each of the camps, as well as in several of the assembly centers, while they were open, published newspapers. They varied in format, from mimeographed sheets to printed newspapers; in frequency, from daily to biweekly; and in independence, from carefully watched organs of official communication to autonomous, self-sufficient purveyors of news.

The one thing many of the papers shared in common, aside from the captivity of their writers, was an extensive use of Japanese-style artwork.

Camp newspapers regularly featured exquisite line drawings depicting life behind the barbed wire. The Japanese-American community contained many artists, and the camp newspapers offered them an outlet for their work. Several of the artists whose work is represented in *Beyond Words*, a book of artwork by internees, said they relieved their boredom by serving as art director for the camp paper. “I was always busy,” said Miné Okubo, a distinguished artist who had traveled to Europe on an art scholarship before the war. “There wasn’t any photographing allowed so I decided to record everything.”⁶ He served the art editor for both the *Topaz Times* and for *Trek*, a remarkably beautiful literary magazine.

The first internment camp to have a newspaper was Manzanar. It began publishing during the night of April 11, 1942, less than three weeks after the first prisoners arrived. Its first appearance was as a four-page mimeographed publication. “Simple and unpretentious, it made its bow to fulfill a vital need for accurate information,” said the editors of their first effort.⁷ Following the appearance of the *Manzanar Free Press* and other “mimeographed home-product newspapers” at Santa Anita and Sacramento, the Wartime Civil Control Administration issued a directive providing camp managers with the authority to permit the publication of such newspapers. According to General DeWitt, camp management was to retain final control of the content and it was expected that the Public Relations Representative would see to it that “news items were confined to those of actual interest to the evacuees.”⁸

The extent to which the camp officials interfered with the content of the newspapers differed from camp to camp. At some camps, it was obvious to any reader that the heavy hand of censorship was present. At Manzanar, however, the reins were held loosely. Both Camp Director Roy Nash and Ralph Merritt, who succeeded him in December 1942, gave the *Free Press* wide latitude in what it could publish. As a result, the paper provided extensive and accurate coverage of most aspects of camp life as well as news from other camps, obituaries, sports, women’s columns, and comics. “Because of its relative openness and comprehensiveness in reporting local, national, and international stories,” wrote *Manzanar* authors John Armor and Peter Wright, “the *Free Press* became the voice of the Nisei in all camps, circulating by mail to the others.”⁹

The *Free Press* was launched by Tomomasa Yamasaki, Joe Blarney, Togo Tanaka, San Tsuratani, Chiye Mohir, Sam Hohri, and Roy Hoshizaki. Many

of them were ex-newspaper writers who had worked for the Japanese dailies and weeklies that were suppressed with the relocation. Before publishing their new paper they sought permission from Bob Brown, the head of the Office of Officials Reports, which approved or censored all documents produced at or emanating from the camp. He agreed to let them proceed, subject only to the normal censorship that applied to any publication in the United States during the war.¹⁰ The journalists' sense of enthusiasm was evident in the proclamation that accompanied the inaugural issue. "Truth must be the keystone of this community so we have called this the *Manzanar Free Press*," wrote the editors.¹¹

The first issue, produced on a "limping, erratic mimeo press" was four pages long. Its masthead was hand lettered, set against an airy drawing of the Sierra Nevada, and the columns were typewritten. From the start, the editors intended that the *Free Press* would be self-supporting and thus, one surmises, free from charges that it was an agency of the administration. Most of the camp newspapers did not follow this path. For example, the cost of the *Poston Chronicle*, a daily which began publishing in May at the Poston War Relocation Center in Arizona, was shared at first by the camp's Cooperative Enterprise and the War Relocation Administration (WRA). In August of 1943, the paper's expenses were completely subsumed by the WRA, which found camp newspapers "useful in making instructions known."¹²

While it was true that "a primary function" of the camp newspapers was to transmit policies and instructions from the prison administration, said the editors of the *Free Press*, "the presumption that therefore the publication is the sole organ of the administration is erroneous." In fact, administrative news releases comprised only 3 to 8 percent of any issue, according to a statistical analysis of the *Free Press* conducted by the Office of Reports (incidentally revealing how closely the papers were watched).¹³

Camp newspaper editors had to walk a fine line. Hiro Mizushima was co-art director of the *Rohwer Outpost*, published at the Rohwer Relocation Center in Arkansas. He recalled that his newspaper "hoped to just tell the story of what's going on in the camp. There were mixed emotions because the staff had to satisfy the people who were interned and also those who were in charge of the camp."¹⁴ Frequently camp newspapers published items that were clearly prepared by the authorities. For example, the June 6, 1942, issue of the *Free Press* reported on the construction of six to eight

wafctowers around the perimeter of the camp. The towers, said the *Free Press*, were furnishing “improved visibility to the watchmen and providing for the security to the residents.”¹⁵ Clearly, the readership of the *Free Press*, upon whom the watchtower guns would be trained, knew better. But reading the early issues of the *Free Press*, one wonders if in fact the editors were not making dexterous use of irony to avoid direct confrontation with the censors. For instance, the same issue of the *Free Press* reported, without comment, that Congressman Leland Ford had come to Manzanar to visit Ichijiro Sokata, his gardener of seventeen years. All internees knew that Ford had been amongst the first to agitate for internment. “I submit,” Ford had written Stimson the month following Pearl Harbor, “that if an American-born Japanese, who is a citizen, is really patriotic and wishes to make his contribution to the safety and welfare of this country, right here is his opportunity to do so, namely, that permitting himself to be placed in a concentration camp, he would be making his sacrifice.”¹⁶

At the same time, the *Free Press* was direct in its coverage of the injustices done to Japanese-Americans outside of the camps. It reported on the case of Koji Kurokawa, 38, who was “found weak, emaciated, and on verge of collapse” after hiding for a month in his employer’s cellar. “I’ve been confused since the war began,” Kurokawa said, “because I am an American citizen and I want to stay in a free country and be a free man.” As he was led away to be consigned to U.S. marshals, the *Free Press* reported, Kurokawa mumbled over and over again “I didn’t want to go to a camp.”¹⁷

By June, the *Free Press* had become an important part of camp life. Its frequency increased to three times a week, and it regularly appeared in a six-page edition. “Now we have passed through infancy and adolescence, we are approaching manhood,” wrote the editors on June 9, 1942.

We want to repeat again that the *Free Press* belongs to the people of Manzanar, that, instead of being merely the mouthpiece of the administration, it strives to express the opinions of the evacuees in the solution of immediate and foreseen problems.¹⁸

A month later the transformation to manhood became complete when the *Free Press* began appearing in a typeset format with photographs, not unlike a traditional newspaper. The improvement permitted the paper to strengthen its financial independence. Until now its support had been derived from subscriptions and money provided by the camp’s co-op. With its new format, the paper embarked on an aggressive drive for

advertisements. The response from merchants was strong. “A flood of advertisements [came] in by telephone, mail and by persons,” said the editors.¹⁹ Sears Roebuck and Co, Joseph Dry Goods in nearby Lone Pine, Western Truck Lines, JC Penney, and others bought space in the new paper. “From thumbtacks to tractors, diapers to dresses, your every need can be supplied,” promised Sears.²⁰

“Although our days of nursing a temperamental mimeograph machine are over, our real work has just begun,” said the editors. Now publishing twice a week a four- to six-page newspaper with an enlarged staff, the *Free Press* had a better chance of living up to its stated purpose of creating an informed and alert population at Manzanar.

At times our critics have hurled charges of censorship and curled their lips in irony at the name *Free Press*. Despite handicaps, we have tried to be true to our original promise of squelching rumors, upholding morale, printing authentic information, and making constructive criticism.²¹

Right away, in the first issue under its new format, the *Free Press* showed that its mere existence made it harder for the injustices perpetrated by the authorities to go unnoticed. Two internees were taken into custody by the FBI and removed from Manzanar. The *Free Press* reported their arrest on the front page, concluding with the line “No reasons were advanced for the warrants and their destinations were undisclosed.”²²

The *Free Press*’s coverage of camp life, however, was not appreciated by all Manzanar residents. Three weeks later two members of the *Free Press*, one of them handicapped, were assaulted and injured. “The ostensible reason for the attack was the publication of a routine police report, a notation of charges filed against one Toshinori Asashi,” wrote the editors. But the paper remained defiant. “We would not be fulfilling our duty to the community if we allow ourselves to be gagged by mere threats of violence.”²³

There were limits to what could be published, however. “The Project Director,” said the WRA program guide, “may suspend publication of the newspaper at any time if this seems necessary in the interest of public peace and community security.”²⁴ Such an occasion arose at Manzanar in December 1942 when three young men were killed and another ten were wounded during a protest of the arrest of an internee charged with beating an informant. Up to the eve of the incident, the *Free Press* had chronicled

rising tension at the camp. At the end of November, the paper covered an attempted arson at the general store and, in a subsequent issue, reported that the arson may have stemmed from a simmering dispute between various factions in the cooperative enterprise. But when the Manzanar Uprising occurred, the paper disappeared for two weeks. When publication was resumed, no mention was made of the incident except for a tiny item in an article looking back on events in 1942 published in January 1943.

Dec. 5: All activities suspended.

Dec. 19: All activities resumed.

The killing of an internee at the Topaz War Relocation Camp three months later produced a much different result for camp newspaper the *Topaz Times*. The *Times* was started by Henri Takahashi, who had been on the staff of a San Francisco Japanese-American newspaper. A graduate of Pomona, Takahashi had come voluntarily to Topaz among the first wave of internees in order to escape the dreadful conditions of the Tanforan Assembly Center, where he and his wife, Tomoye Nozawa, had been held since their forced evacuation from San Francisco. “Tomoye and her husband Henri,” said Sandra C. Taylor, author of *Jewel of the Desert: Japanese American Internment at Topaz*, “made the best of their existence, founding and working on the *Topaz Times*; they took especial pride in the ways they avoided censorship through clever words and phrases.”²⁵

On the evening of April 11, 1943, James Wakasa, 63, was shot and killed by a military police sentry near the camp fence. The following morning, the *Topaz Times* published an Extra carrying an account of the killing and a statement from the administration. The account said that Wakasa “was warned back four times by the sentries on duty. When he failed to heed the warnings, one of the sentries fired and Wakasa was instantly killed.”²⁶

Over the coming weeks, the *Times* published two more extras and chronicled the funeral, attended by 1,500 to 2,000 internees; a work stoppage held in protest of the killing; the arrest and court-martial of the sentry, whose name was not revealed; the arrival of the Spanish legation, which represented Japanese interests in the United States during the war; the withdrawal of sentries during daylight hours; the order for MPs not to enter the camp and to cease carrying tommy guns and tear gas canisters; and WRA assurances that such an event would not reoccur.

True, in the midst of this flurry of reporting, most readers knew that the complete story was not being told. In fact, the first account published in the *Times* was not entirely correct and raised as many questions among the residents as it answered, according to Sandra Taylor.²⁷ But even on that score, the *Times* staff managed to preserve some of its independence and self-respect. On the front page of its April 13 issue, an editor's note appeared in a box. The report contained in the special edition, said the note, "was prepared by the Project Administration.... All information contained in the report was based on official preliminary information received from the Military Police.* The report submitted by the administration was printed verbatim in the special edition."²⁸

During the Wakasa episode, the importance the camp administrators attached to the extras published by the *Topaz Times* was reflected in the fact that they were published in bilingual editions. The use of Japanese in any manner in the camps was a touchy matter. Policy forbade conducting classes or meetings in Japanese. Even the use of Japanese in religious services required the permission of the camp director.²⁹ But the growth in camp newspapers had caused an erosion of this policy, as camp directors increasingly consented to the publication of translations or modest special Japanese sections. During its first year, the *Free Press* frequently published a Japanese translation for the internees who did not read or speak English. In October, Manzanar again took the lead among the papers when the *Free Press* obtained permission to turn its Japanese edition into a separate (and competing) publication with its own staff. "The fact that Manzanar is the only relocation center so far which has this special permission to print a Japanese edition speaks highly of the ability and sincerity of its editors," said the editorial in the *Free Press*?³⁰

As the most visible of the camp newspapers, the *Free Press* also took it upon itself to try to get the other camp newspapers to follow its editorial path. It sought to persuade the others to join it in pushing for ending the camps. "The time has come for a coordinated and concerted public relations campaign for repatriation - a repatriation into normal American life," said the *Free Press*. "This is, and should be, the major task and policy of all center publications."³¹

The promoter of this notion was probably Roy Takeno, who had been the guiding figure behind the paper since December 1942. A graduate of the School of Journalism at the University of Southern California and the

former editor of the *Los Angeles California Daily News*, Takeno served as editor and editor-in-chief of the *Free Press*. During his tenure, it became the most professional of the camp newspapers and the most widely read. In fact, one of Takeno's editorials—an open letter to the American people—was widely reprinted in newspapers around the country. “The tragic experiences of evacuation, the business losses of the evacuees, the unwarranted hatred engendered by some people because of our hereditary kinship with the Asiatic foe - these we write of our ledger...,” wrote Takeno. Instead, he said, internees are ready to bear any burden in seeking to resettle themselves and reestablish their businesses. “We ask you, the American people, to try us on our merits, realizing it is one of the characteristics of the country we love to appraise its people by the contribution they can make toward the total welfare of the nation.”³²

But on the whole, the efforts of the camp journalists were ignored by the population at large. General DeWitt's final report quotes, with approval, the remarks of John Barry, a columnist of the *San Francisco News*. “Some day,” Barry wrote, “they [the newspapers] will be material for history, records of a curious interval, sought by collectors, preserved in libraries.”³³ Barry's prediction underestimated their value. The papers remain today as an enduring chronicle of the wrongful imprisonment of Americans.

*Copies of the book were regularly burned at anti-Japanese demonstrations.

*The military and the WRA were frequently on opposing sides of camp management issues, and the WRA itself was stymied by the military several times during the course of its investigation of the death of Wakasa.

Chapter 13

Der Ruf

The eyes of the Führer are stern and severe.

—*Die Brücke*
German POW newspaper,
Camp Breckinridge, KY

During World War II, prison journalism enlisted in the U.S. war effort as part of an unusual experiment. It was recruited to join an endeavor to “reeducate” Nazi prisoners of war held in concentration camps around the United States. According to historian Arnold Krammer, author of *Nazi Prisoners of War in America*, the idea was to help create a non-Nazi postwar Germany by exposing prisoners to the superiority of democracy. “Like true believers in any faith,” said Krammer, “Americans were convinced that the political heretics of Nazi Germany would themselves come to see the obvious benefits of democracy if only they were properly educated.”¹

It was an ambitious project. Alone, the confinement of enemy prisoners of war in the United States was a major undertaking. Liberty ships, having deposited their cargo overseas, steamed back daily to the United States from 1942 to 1945 with their cargo holds full of captive enemy troops. Beginning with thirty-one German soldiers and one lonely Japanese soldier, the incarceration of prisoners of war in the continental United States grew to a peak of 425,871 at some five hundred camps by 1945. Of these, the vast majority, 371,683, were Germans. Italians accounted for 50,273, and 3,915 were Japanese.² To accommodate these inmates, the federal government constructed a new prison system virtually overnight, larger than the one housing its criminal population. But unlike the few thousand criminals in Leavenworth, Atlanta, and McNeil Island, the new federal wards were

being brought to the United States for safekeeping only until the great conflict was over.

In 1944, as the end of the war neared, the government launched a secret reeducation experiment. The Prisoner of War Special Projects Division (SPD) was created, and a number of academics and German refugees were enlisted to establish a program by which the thousands of Nazi prisoners of war confined in the United States would be taught to “understand and believe historical and ethical truth as conceived by Western civilization.”³ The plan was kept secret because officials feared it might violate the Geneva Convention and because if Nazi prisoners read about it in the *New York Times* its effectiveness would be undermined.

The SPD selected Captain Walter Schoenstedt, an exiled German novelist and former newspaper editor, to assemble a team of carefully chosen POWs, all former professors and writers who had exhibited anti-Nazi behavior since their captivity. They were first brought to a former Civilian Conservation Corps camp in Van Etten, New York, in the fall of 1944 and then, a few months later, moved to Fort Philip Kearney in Rhode Island where their secret work could be better carried out. This camp came to be known as the Idea Factory or more simply, the Factory. The eighty-five prisoners, all of whom volunteered, worked under enviable conditions. There were no armed guards and they were able to go regularly into nearby Jamestown.

The plan called for using literature, movies, newspapers and magazines, music, art, and classes to convert the POWs to American ideals and values. “Thus, it was hoped,” wrote Judith Gansberg in *Stalag: USA*, “they would be convinced of the impracticality and viciousness of Nazism. The long-range aim was to form a nucleus of adherents to a new German ideology and advocacy of a democratic system in Germany.”⁴ Specifically, to achieve this goal, the Factory schemed to expose the captured soldiers to films that refuted the Nazi claim that the United States was decadent and corrupt, German books that revealed the “true” history of Germany and the United States, and a national German prisoner-of-war newspaper aimed at encouraging democratic self-expression.⁵ It was the latter idea that would become the most important mission of the Factory.

Already most of the camps possessed newspapers. In fact, both Italian and German POWs had established at least eighty prison papers. By 1943, according to Louis E. Keefer, author of *Italian Prisoners of War in America*,

1942-1946, the college-educated Italian POWs housed at Camp Hereford, Texas, published their own reading material.

Camp newsletters included *II Powieri* (derived from POW), reporting camp news generally; *Argomenti*, devoted to literature and politics; and *Olympia*. ... covering sports. These original-manuscript magazines were circulated hand to hand because the prisoners had no means of reproducing them.⁶

At Camp Weingarten, Missouri, POW Aldo Ferraresi recounted in his diary launching a prison paper at his camp:

We started a POW newspaper, called *Oltremare* [Over the Ocean]. It touches various subjects, and if nothing else it is good because it gives us something to read in Italian. In today's edition [August 22, 1943] a captain had the bad idea to write one article with the title "Invertebrati," insulting as spineless any officer who reads American newspapers! A cavalry captain gets so mad that he tracks down the writer, and slaps him so much and so hard that he dislocates his own shoulder.⁷

But it was the Germans who were on the minds of the SPD, not the Italians, who for the most part, were thought to be less recalcitrant. When the Factory opened for business, it began its work by obtaining samples of the seventy German POW newspapers. The Fort Kearney POWs translated them into English so that the Americans could closely study and monitor their content. The first review of more than fifty camp papers was completed in March 1945. It revealed that the Factory had its work cut out for it. Nearly half of the camp papers were found to be pro-Nazi, and only three were anti-Nazi. The rest were somewhere between the two positions. "Once each paper was properly categorized, the men of the Camp Newspaper Section at The Factory monitored each issue in search of hopeful trends," wrote Krammer.⁸ While some studied existing prison papers, others began planning and designing for the creation of a publication to rival the camp newspapers.

The authorities had permitted the establishment of camp newspapers because they were an excellent means of transmitting information to their non-English-speaking wards, they occupied the men, and they served as a means to monitor the political and emotional mood of the prisoners. "Moreover," said Krammer, "once the reeducation program got underway, these papers would serve as an experiment in democracy which allowed the inmates to write anything they pleased without fear of censorship or retaliation."⁹ It was not long before most camps had a newspaper. The

papers, such as the mimeographed *Drahtpost*, which sold for ten cents a copy at the Algona, Iowa, camp, featured camp news, sports, humor, a calendar of events, crossword puzzles, obituaries, and even classified advertisements. The *Deutsche Woche*, published by prisoners at Fort Lewis, Washington, carried long translations of war news from the *New York Times*. (The latter created a humorous situation, as American intelligence found themselves reading English translations of German translations of American journalism.) “They were remarkable efforts by the prisoners, an outlet for talent which might easily have been directed toward less acceptable channels and a continuous diversion for men behind barbed wire,” said Krammer.¹⁰

The competitor to these paper being conceived at the Factory would be named *Der Ruf (the Call)*. As its first editor, Schoenstedt selected Gustav René Hocke, a POW who had once been a correspondent in Rome for a German-Catholic newspaper. On March 6, 1945, German POW camp canteens put eleven thousand copies of *Der Ruf* on sale for five cents each while members of the Factory awaited the reaction of their countrymen. The paper was certainly not light reading. The front page of its premier issue featured a long article on the human soul as seen through the eyes of Goethe and Schopenhauer and other German intellectuals. Inside, a POW could find war news, including discussion of bombing raids over Germany, musical and literary reviews, sports, letters to the editor (how they were obtained for a newspaper that had not been previously published was not disclosed), and an editorial.

The German Prisoners in the United States now have their OWN NEWSPAPER.

...Administration, editing, and composition of this newspaper will be done by German prisoners of war, who, like you, live in barracks behind barbed wire, and like you, have daily annoyances: regulation, K.P., work detail, count. And, Brother!

How often we have been counted!!¹¹

Many POWs were unimpressed and unconvinced that this was a genuine German product. Copies of *Der Ruf* were burned at Camp Trinidad in Colorado.¹² At Camp Perry in Ohio, a sign was posted urging prisoners to boycott the paper. “Do the Americans believe they can force upon us a newspaper of traitors and deserters?” it asked. According to Ron Robin, author of *The Barbed Wire College*, a camp official in Alabama reported to his superiors that there were many reasons for the POWs to be suspicious of *Der Ruf*. It was printed on expensive paper instead of the poor-quality

recycled paper used for the camp papers, its layout suggested that the paper had no budgetary constraints, and its New York mailing address cast doubt as to whether its editors were indeed POWs.¹³

“*Der Ruf* did indeed seem to be nothing more than a piece of misconceived propaganda written by outsiders,” wrote Robin. But sales figures revealed that someone was buying it. By the fifteenth issue, seventy-five thousand copies of the paper were being printed, and 90 percent of each edition was sold. In fact, as it cost only three and a half cents to print *Der Ruf*, it became a profitable venture!¹⁴ It remained, nonetheless, a ponderous and cerebral newspaper filled with long, didactic articles. “As the prize product of the Factory ostensibly seeking the attention of the ordinary prisoner,” noted Robin, “*Der Ruf* was more a reflection of private intellectual controversies among the prisoner-aides than a meaningful attempt to proselytize among unrepentant POWs.”¹⁵ A reader would have to wonder if it was not being bought up by the POWS mostly because of their insatiable hunger for anything German.

The existing POW newspapers certainly remained viable during *Der Ruf*s rise. At Papago Park in Arizona, for example, POW Rolf-Kurt Gebeschus increased the publishing schedule of his *Papago-Rundschau* from monthly to weekly. In December 1945, he scooped his nine-month-old rival when he persuaded German writer Thomas Mann to write a foreword to a special issue.¹⁶ The newspapers, however, did change their political stripes over the course of the year, especially as it became evident that the war was lost. Cryptic Factory analyses of the papers tracked the changes in the papers down to their smallest aspect, such as this one regarding the *POW Zeitspiegel* published at Camp Blanding, Florida:

April 27, 1945 against editor Werner Kinon and “Nazi tone” and appearance of paper. Moral criticism of nudes in the papers. These become more voluptuous as captivity wears on. Beginning July 15, 1945 the eagle is dropped from masthead, showing presence of re-education.¹⁷

Whether it was the work of *Der Ruf*, the POWs’ ability to see the writing on the wall, or the forced replacement of editors on the camp newspapers, Krammer found the change in political attitude was so significant that SPD was able to boast of a new set of figures at the end of the war. Now only three of the eighty camp newspapers whose contents the Factory analyzed were found to be pro-Nazi.

In 1946, German POWs were repatriated, including those who had worked at the Factory. Two of *Der Ruf*'s editors, Hans Werner Richter and Alfred Andersch, found work in occupied Germany publishing a new incarnation of the newspaper, even calling it by the same name. This time, however, the democratic forces that occupied the land suppressed the paper because its editors wrote about what they perceived to be the imperialistic designs of Russia and the United States. Now that the POWs were free, they were no longer free to write whatever they wanted. Richter and Andersch retired to the Bavarian mountains and started Gruppe 47. It grew into "a literary movement which gave German literature a tremendous postwar impetus and once more made German literature an important factor in world literature," according to scholar Karl Arndt.¹⁸ In the end, *Der Ruf* became a footnote in German literary history.

Chapter 14

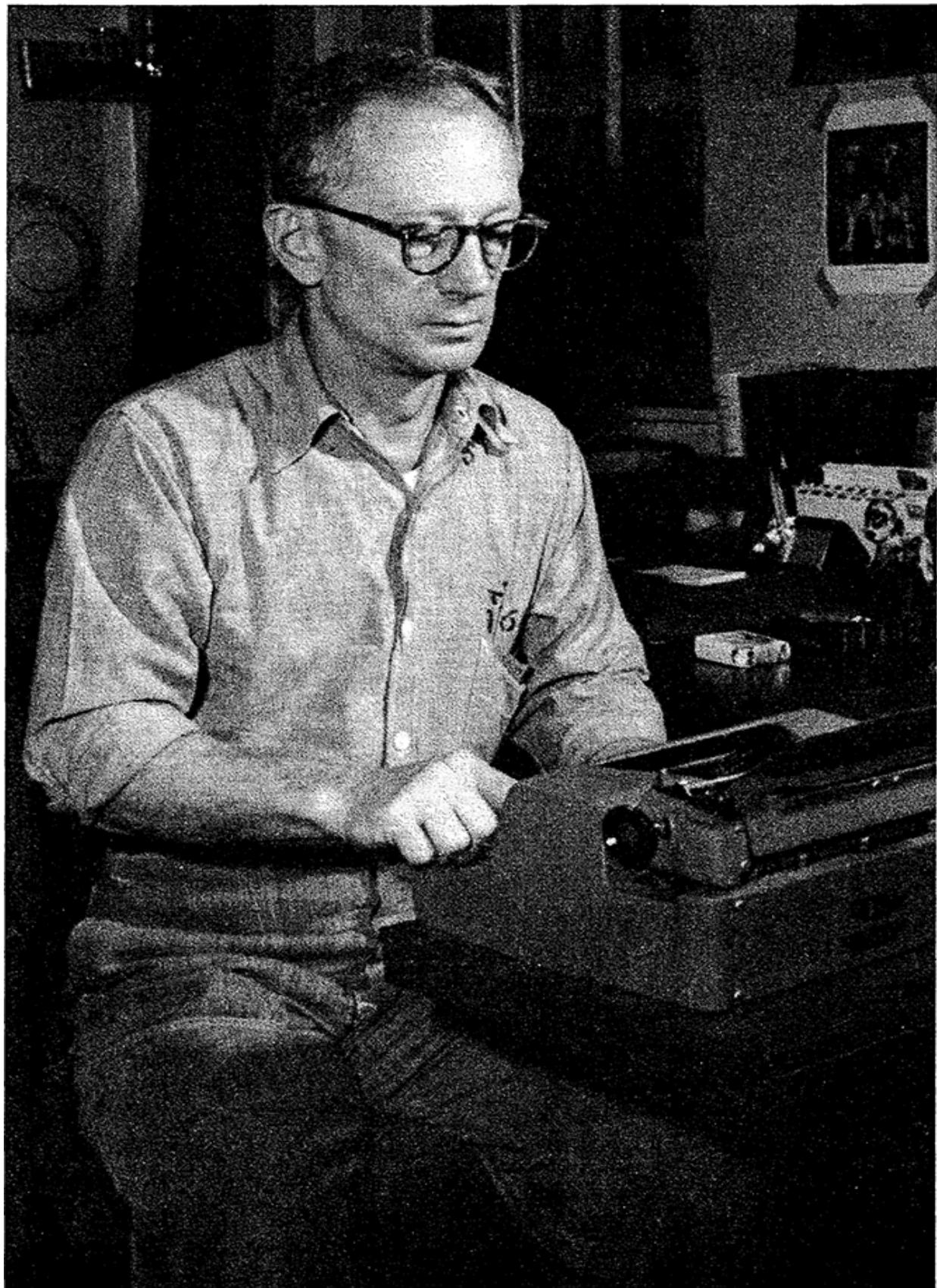
Leaves from a Lifer's Notebook

Little drops of water, falling on hard stone, will eventually wear the stone away. Little words beating constantly on the ears of a lethargic public, will eventually make an impression. It is true, as many critics point out, that prison problems are old and tiresome subjects. But, without that constant barrage of articles, prisoners might still be living in the age of the bucket brigade.

—Tom Runyon, “Why Prison Magazines?” *The Presidio* October 1941

In 1938, Tom Runyon, an infamous depression-era bank robber confined to the Iowa State Penitentiary at Fort Madison, hesitatingly submitted his first contribution to the prison’s four-year-old magazine. In doing so he joined the ranks of thousands of other prisoners of his era who considered the prison press an important part of their confined culture. Prison publications had undergone a prodigious growth in the 1930s. By the end of the decade almost every major prison in the United States boasted some sort of prisoner-produced publication.

Runyon’s article was, as he called it, a “two-chewed-up-pencils, surprise-ending four-hundred-worder.”¹ But as meager as it may have been, it represented the start of one of prison journalism’s most prolific and talented careers. Within a little more than a decade Runyon won national acclaim. *The New York Times*, for example, called him “a remarkably gifted observer of the passing penitentiary scene.”² Louis Messolonghites, writing in the *Reporter*, told his readers that Runyon had “become one of my favorite authors.”³ And Erie Stanley Gardner, mystery writer and creator of Perry Mason, launched a nationwide campaign to win Runyon’s release from prison after reading one of his columns. Over time, inmates bestowed upon Runyon the title “dean of prison writers,” formerly worn by Hugh DeAutremont.⁴



With permission from the warden to sleep beside his desk, *Presidio* editor Tom Runyon worked day and night writing his autobiography on his Royal typewriter in 1952. (Photo: Photography collection, Harry Ransom Research Center, the University of Texas at Austin.)

Runyon had been sent to the state prison in 1937 following a four-year career as a bank robber. Only by a stroke of luck had he been able to escape the death penalty for the killings he committed during his robberies. Instead, he was given a life sentence for murder. Escorted by fifteen armed guards, he was delivered to the Iowa State Prison. As the door closed on his cell, illuminated by a bare twenty-five-watt bulb and containing only a bed, a chair, a wash bowl, a mirror, and a toilet, Runyon faced the stark reality of what, up until now, had seemed to be only a bad dream from which he would soon wake. "I began to realize dimly that once and for all I was different from others," he recalled. "I was a convict, a convict lifer—I was here from now on."⁵

By fall Runyon discovered his first refuge from prison life. Time in his cell, which he previously feared would be the worst part of prison, turned out to be the one time when he could escape his confinement. "With my back turned to the bars so I could ignore passing guards, and with a book on my lap, I could quite often forget my troubles for many minutes at a time." In time, Runyon discovered the prison library. Though he had only completed the seventh grade, he had been always an indiscriminate but avid reader. "Now I tried to read with a purpose," he wrote.⁶

Wrongly convinced that he could win his release in ten years, Runyon was looking for something to pass the time. Some inmates made cloth products in their spare time for sale outside of the prison, but "clearly I couldn't kick ten years while making doilies," said Runyon. Instead he decided to try his hand at writing. "It was just a case of putting one word in front of another until you had an *Anthony Adverse* or *Gone with the Wind*, wasn't it?" he asked. "If they could do it good, why couldn't I learn to do it at least so-so?"⁷

At the time, Ed Bradley, one of the few inmates with whom he had become friends, was the editor of the prison's thirty-two-page monthly magazine, the *Presidio*. Runyon submitted his "two-chewed-up-pencils ... four-hundred-worder" and not only was it published in the following month's *Presidio*, but a number of other prison periodicals reprinted it. "I hugged my little triumph desperately, waiting more than a month before

risking my writing reputation by showing him another story," Runyon wrote.⁸

He submitted another article, and again the editor accepted it, as well as the next and the next. Buoyed by his initial success, the thirty-two-year-old convict began applying himself to the task of learning to write well. He studiously read books on writing and subscribed to a writer's magazine. Each month he turned in his latest effort to the *Presidio*. The publication was still young and valued the steady stream of articles coming from Runyon, even if they possessed the self-conscious awkwardness of a beginning writer.

The writing challenged Runyon. "I found it the hardest work I had ever tried - because of my meager education - and the most fascinating," he wrote. "Often I would spend half the night with scratch-pad and pencil, propped on an elbow in bed, trying to whip some story problem."⁹ Runyon began sending his articles, along with a three-dollar "criticism fee," to a West Coast agent. Agent Gene Bolles must have detected Runyon's potential, as he told the budding writer not to bother with the fee. "Here was someone who thought I could do something," Runyon wrote.¹⁰

Unfortunately for him, so did the federal authorities. With the announced intention of making sure that Runyon would never again be free, the Department of Justice began legal proceedings against him for his involvement in a bank robbery that had included taking hostages. The department invoked the newly created Lindbergh kidnapping law and Runyon was given another life sentence, to be served should he be released from the Iowa penitentiary. Now for the first time, Runyon faced the fact that he might never leave prison. "I began to realize how hopeless my situation was, and my mind was never far from plans or dreams of escape," he wrote.¹¹

Runyon's hard work as a writer for the *Presidio* paid off in 1941. Editor Bill N.,* a Dartmouth graduate, agreed to make him an assistant editor. The new work assignment caused an improvement in Runyon's attitude. Although he was still bitter about his imprisonment, he now had some purpose to carry him through each day. "Where I had been angry about my own troubles, I began to be more concerned over injustices to others, for many a man brought his problems to me, hoping I could help him," he remembered. "Instead of hating wildly and uselessly, I had to channel and control my bitterness and put it into words." He now worked for his fellow inmates, not the hated state, and he relished the opportunity to give the few

outside readers of the *Presidio* the truth about prison life.’¹² ‘Full of ideas, I kept my typewriter keys warm,’ he wrote. ‘My cry in the penological wilderness was faint but I kept at it so hard I lost track of personal troubles for hours at a time.’¹³

Not long after Runyon became assistant editor, Bill N. was released. Runyon applied for his job, but Warden Glenn Haynes was reluctant to appoint him. Haynes did not question Rimyon’s talent, but all the previous editors had been trustees, with privileges. Runyon was marked as one of the prison’s two most dangerous security risks. But as Hayes liked Runyon, he came up with a compromise. Runyon could have the position if he agreed to complete his work during regular hours - he would not be allowed out of his cell at other times. Runyon agreed.

Warden Haynes had reason to be concerned. Escape had never faded completely from Runyon’s thoughts, and two sets of events made him consider it again seriously. First, in 1942, his wife told him that she was seeking a divorce, and a few days after getting the news, he found out his mother had died. Second, in 1943, Runyon made an enemy of the parole board with an editorial outlining five reasons why parole “is a near failure.” The editorial was reprinted in different newspapers around the state, and Runyon believed it doomed whatever slim chance he might have had of eventually being released on parole.

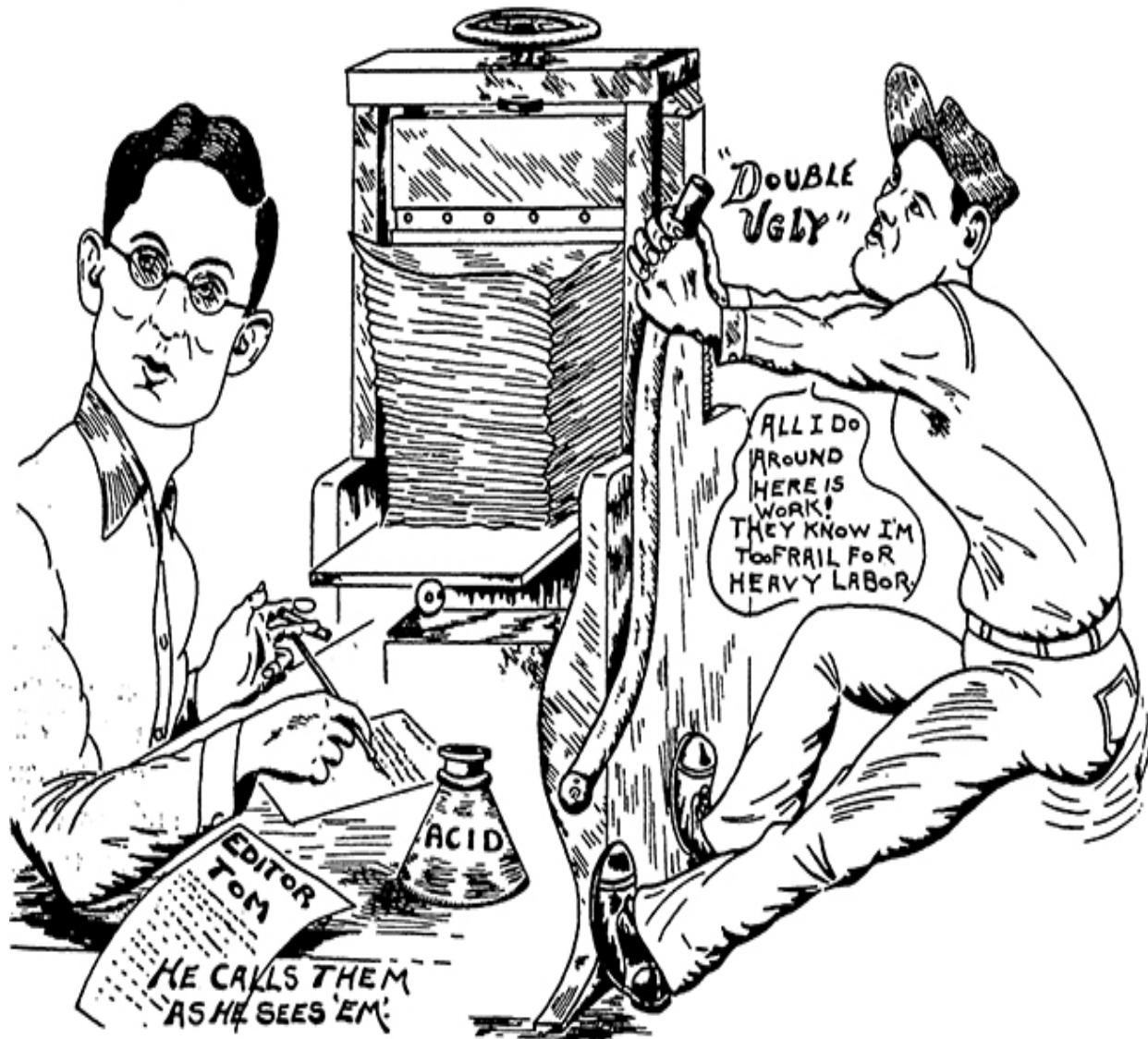
In the summer of 1943 Haynes died. Percy A. Lainson, a former sheriff, was appointed to the post of warden. Lainson, to his misfortune, gave Runyon what Haynes had denied. Runyon would be allowed out of his cell in the evening to work on the *Presidio*. One Monday evening in early September, Runyon dug his way under a heavily charged electric fence and escaped under the cover of darkness. Authorities launched one of the biggest manhunts ever in Iowa. While on the lam, Runyon held up and terrorized several farm families, took hostages, and stole at least two cars. On the fifth day, a lonely and confused Runyon was arrested in Fort Dodge after a brief exchange of gunfire.

His freedom was short-lived and bittersweet. Ironically, after his arrest police officers were able to reconstruct Runyon’s journey across the state because bitten by the bug of writing, Runyon had kept a detailed diary. Back at Fort Madison, Lainson placed Runyon in solid lockup, a section of solitary confinement, for ten months. Located in a basement, his cell was damp and cold. Water trickled down the walls and across the floor.

“Magazines were limp as rags, and cigarettes had to be dried against the light bulb before they could be smoked,” wrote Runyon.¹⁴

After five years of solitary confinement, maximum security, and careful supervision Runyon was slowly integrated back into the prison’s general population. On a summer evening in 1948, much like the one five years earlier when Runyon had made his run for freedom, Lloyd Eddy, the *Presidio*’s newest editor, approached Runyon in the prison yard to ask if he would be willing to come back to work for the magazine. Since Runyon’s departure from the staff, the magazine had fallen on hard times. Runyon’s former assistant editor, Gordon Holmes, had quit rather than produce a more censored version of the magazine. The succeeding editor had let the magazine deteriorate further by publishing mostly poor-quality inmate fiction. Eddy, however, remembered the old *Presidio* and wanted to bring it back. Runyon told Eddy that the warden would never approve the idea. “Can you see me asking the Old Man to put me back up there after the way I messed him up the last time?” he asked. “You won’t have to ask,” replied Eddy. “I’ll do the asking. All you need do is agree to come back if I get it fixed.”¹⁵

In September, Runyon’s name was once again on the *Presidio*’s masthead. “Five wordless years made a difference,” recalled Runyon of his first days back in the magazine’s office. “My writing was rusty, but the ideas were there.” His first contribution was a short allegorical essay called “In the Shadow of the Wall,” in which he urged his fellow convicts to combat the prison’s power to stifle their ability to think for themselves. “Like any other shadow, the wall’s effect is slow,” he wrote, “its advance so stealthy that the prisoner may be all but drowned in its painless apathy without being aware of it at all.” In the end the prisoner must depend on himself, and on himself only, to keep his mind sharp and preserve his ability to make decisions for himself which the routine of prison life can destroy, he wrote. “No one will drag him away if he chooses to sit in the shadow of the wall,” wrote Runyon.¹⁶



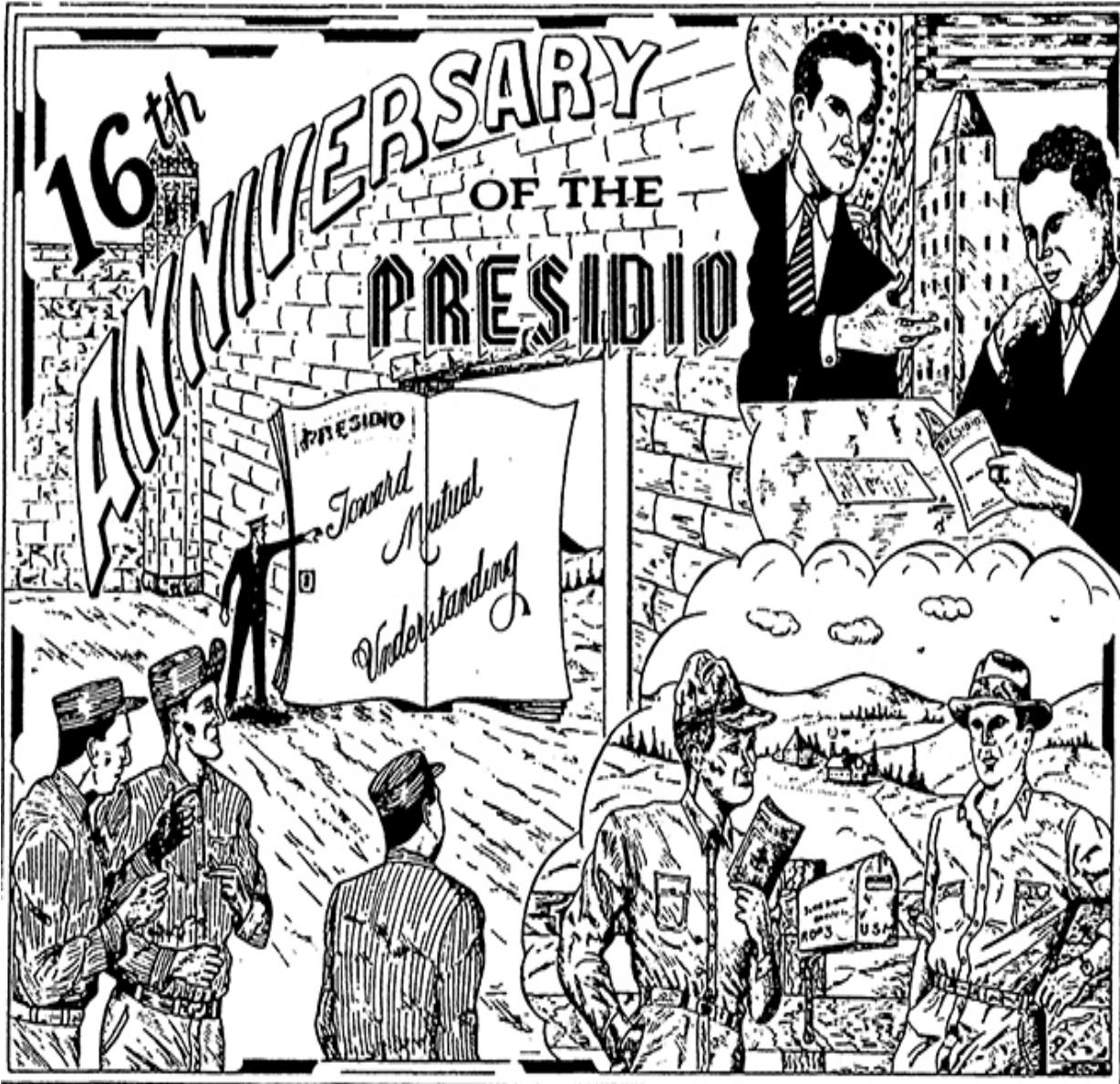
In this 1950 caricature of Tom Runyon (left), the *Presidio*'s artist shows him dipping his pen in acid, reflecting Runyon's battles against the state's inflexible parole board.

He followed his own advice and threw himself into his work, hogging the *Presidio*'s only typewriter each day. He moved his old desk into the corner of the magazine's office, facing the wall, and seldom did he rise from his swivel chair. In November, Runyon started a monthly column, *Leaves from a Lifer's Notebook*, to take care of the small random ideas, reminiscences, updates, and other items he accumulated but could not include elsewhere. It was, said Runyon, "a rambling kind of dissertation on how little things can have far-reaching effects on a lifer."¹⁷ The column soon became a popular

feature of the *Presidio*, a kind of personal letter from Runyon to readers. As Ernie Pyle had done for the GI during World War II, Runyon's writings became the inarticulate prisoner's dispatch to the outside world.

But Runyon's greatest skill, the one that distinguishes him from generations of prison journalists, was his ability to write profile pieces. Runyon had demonstrated an interest in writing about other lifers ever since he first began writing for the *Presidio* in 1938. "Be sure to write something about lifers, Tom," urged Ole Lindquist, a fellow lifer who would later play an important part in Runyon's career. "These others are just visiting the joint. We live here," he said.¹⁸

Since the early 1940s Runyon had followed Lindquist's advice, writing almost monthly articles about some of the unusual lifers in the prison and what kind of lives they made for themselves faced with the realization that they would never again be free. "The Planter" written in April of 1943, for example, was the story of "Walnut Seed" Edwards, who after spending most of his life in a New York tenement, now passed his years planting walnut trees in and around the prison.



The lofty purpose that many inmates attached to their work as prison journalists is reflected in this illustration that appeared in the March 1950 anniversary issue of the *Presidio*.

A little over a year after Runyon rejoined the *Presidio*, his writing skills returning, he selected Lindquist as the subject for one of his profiles. Lindquist's story was a sad one. Lindquist had been sent to prison when he was nineteen for killing a policeman shortly after arriving in the United States as an immigrant from Sweden. In December 1949, the month Runyon published the profile, Lindquist was completing forty years in prison. Lindquist had not received a visitor in forty years, a Christmas package in

thirty years, or a personal letter in twenty years. He was a forgotten man. In “Christmas Behind the Eight Ball” Runyon told Lindquist’s story. “When asked about Christmas, he merely smiled. ‘It’s just one more day for me,’ he said.” Newspapers and radio stations picked up the story and spread it across the country. Soon Lindquist was buried under an avalanche of presents, letters, and cards. The mail crew piled about two hundred packages into Lindquist’s cell while he stood helplessly looking from package to package, unable to decide which to open first. Lindquist’s tale did not end with that flurry of Christmas presents. Some people took to writing to the governor. Wealthy correspondents promised to look into hiring a lawyer, and others with less money offered prayers. Because of the outpouring of support, the governor commuted Lindquist’s sentence, making him eligible for parole.¹⁹

One woman, Addie Jackson, a widow from Indianola who had read Lindquist’s tale, began a regular correspondence with the inmate. Following her visit to the prison, they fell in love. In 1952, Lindquist was released after spending forty-two years in the Iowa State Prison. Six months later, after obtaining permission from the authorities, Lindquist and Jackson were married. The then-famous couple - especially after appearing on television’s “This is Your Life” program - settled in Addie’s hometown. Lindquist opened a small shoe repair shop using the skills he acquired from twenty years’ work in the prison’s shoe factory. Shortly after getting settled, Lindquist began suffering from what the doctors diagnosed as rheumatism. On Christmas Day 1954, Lindquist broke his leg while turning over in bed. The doctors had been wrong. Now they told Addie Lindquist her husband was dying of cancer; his bones were as brittle as dried twigs. Addie Lindquist brought her husband home from the hospital where she could care for him. She broke the news to him. “Oh Tom,” she wrote Runyon, “it is awful to just have to sit by and watch the one you love die by inches. He has suffered more than any little man should.”²⁰

Before his death, Lindquist always told his supporters who wrote him not to forget Runyon, whose words had set him on the road to freedom. “He’s a lifer, too,” Lindquist would say. The whole episode did bring considerable national attention to Runyon. Lindquist’s story, as written by Runyon, was bought by *Colliers*. The *Saturday Evening Post* then published a story by Runyon about the inmates who fished unsupervised in boats on the Mississippi to supplement the prison’s food stocks.

“In due time a check for three hundred dollars arrived,” wrote Runyon, “and [we] thought of ourselves as writers’.” Runyon then sold another article to the *Evening Post* and another to *Colliers*. His years of sitting behind the typewriter with a cloud of bluish smoke above from his constant smoking began to pay dividends. Some dividends were more important than the checks the New York editors sent him. “I had achieved a kind of precarious peace and a shaky courage,” he wrote.²¹ “Time was when I helped myself to other men’s money. Time was when ... I helped myself to another man’s life,” Runyon told the audience of Edward R. Mnnrow’s *This I Believe* program. But now he sought only to help himself. “I am forced to try to be honest with myself, and that has a way of turning into honesty with others. I must help others as I help myself.”²²

Runyon continued to apply himself to doing his monthly portraits of the Iowa lifers. “When I write about a prisoner I look for the good in him; look for the story that has never been told,” wrote Runyon. “Of course, I know there’s bad in the man, just as I know there is in men, and you and our mutual Aunt Susies.” But Runyon was always in search of the side of the inmate’s story that was not being told. He was especially attracted to other lifers who, like himself, had avoided the “shadow of the wall.” Edward Farrant, for instance, was one of Runyon’s subjects because he proved, in Runyon’s words, “that it takes more than a thirty-foot wall and decades of imprisonment to stop such a mind.” Farrant, a former coal miner, now worked in the prison’s radio room developing an oscillator and bombarding seeds with sound waves to see if they altered the plant’s growth.

“No doubt I’ll go on writing those little stories,” noted Runyon, “because of those who come to me in the yard with ‘Say, I’m glad to see your writeup on Joe, Tom. He’s overdue for a break.’”²³ Runyon’s stories continued to make a mark on outside readers as well. “His name has become well known around Iowa, the Midwest and the nation for his writing,” noted John Reynolds in the *Cedar Rapids Gazette*.²⁴

In October 1951, Runyon received a letter responding to a recent column in which he had expressed curiosity about what outside readers thought of his articles. “You have nothing to worry about,” the letter said. “You’re doing a swell job of writing.” The new fan was Erie Stanley Gardner, creator of Perry Mason and one of the most popular mystery writers of the time. Gardner had become interested in prison reform and had been reading the

Presidio for some time. “Here’s a pat on the back from one writer to another,” Gardner wrote.²⁵

Several months later, W.W. Norton & Co. asked Runyon if he would consider writing his life story. “Consider it?” said Runyon “The typewriter was being practically pecked to death before the editor’s letter fluttered to the floor.”²⁶ With the warden’s permission to sleep beside his desk, Runyon worked day and night on his autobiography, leaving almost all else aside. In October 1953, *In for Life* was published to considerable acclaim. “Since the publication a quarter of a century ago of Victor Nelson’s *Prison Days and Nights*, no other convict has written so sensitively of the torments of penal purgatory,” said Frank O’Leary, reviewing Runyon’s book in the *New York Times Book Review*.²⁷ “Runyon,” said J. R. Perkins in the *Chicago Sunday Tribune Book Review*, “seems to have lived confused in the world of freemen - perhaps most lawbreakers do-but he walks with understanding among the imprisoned. His portraits of them and of himself have no dim strokes.”²⁸ Penologists and general readers should buy the book, said Stafford Derby, writing in the *Christian Science Monitor*. “Both readers will find Runyon a man worth knowing,” Derby said.²⁹

Though Norton refused to release sales figures four decades later, citing company policy, only about three thousand readers followed the reviewers’ advice, according to Runyon. Instead of to his book, readers that year flocked to Norman Pele’s *The Power of Positive Thinking* and to James Jones’s *From Here to Eternity*. The money Runyon hoped the book would bring to pay for his son’s college education never materialized.

Runyon’s book did become a rallying tool for his growing ranks of supporters outside the prison. *In for Life*, Gardner’s increasing interest in Runyon, and Runyon’s growing fame all gave rise to the hope that perhaps he might be able to win his release. Since his first letter to Runyon in 1951, Gardner had become a regular correspondent and had journeyed to Iowa twice to visit Runyon. Over the years, the mystery writer had become increasingly involved in a personal crusade to obtain the release of rehabilitated or wrongly convicted inmates. His best known means was the “Court of Last Resort,” a sort of people’s tribunal whose cases were carried in the men’s magazine *Argosy*.

In Runyon, Gardner saw a symbol for his campaign. “I think your case may turn out to be quite important because I think it may clarify quite a principle in penology,” Gardner told Runyon. “You are in a position where

you can probably do more good for more people in prison than anyone I know of.”³⁰ At first, Gardner believed that quiet diplomacy might secure Runyon’s release. In a short time, however, Gardner decided instead to turn Runyon into a *cause célèbre*. To accomplish that, he sought first to enlarge Runyon’s readership. Gardner began drumming up subscribers to the *Presidio* with stories in *Argosy*. “If we can build up a greater outside circulation for the *Presidio* and it can tell the story of a modern, practical experiment in the field of character development, it may do untold good,” Gardner wrote to Runyon shortly after publishing the first of his stories about the Iowa inmates.³¹ In four months, Gardner’s efforts increased the *Presidio*’s subscription rolls by more than one thousand. With the new readers on his mind, Gardner now counseled Runyon on his writing. His stories would now be read by a number of influential people “who are going to judge your character, your outlook on life, and your rehabilitation by what you put on paper,” Gardner wrote.³² “This means that your writing during the next few months is going to be very, very important. A good many people are going to become Runyon fans if you play it right,” he wrote in another letter. “Your writing, Tom, can convince them that prisoners are human beings.”³³ In addition to gaining Runyon a larger audience, Gardner also began including his story in many of the speeches he gave around the country and began organizing Runyon’s supporters into a committee to work for his release.

Twice in 1955, Gardner traveled to Washington with his committee in hopes of persuading federal justice officials to remove the detainer on Runyon. The problem, as Gardner saw it, was that Iowa would never reduce Runyon’s sentence unless the federal government moved first. If the detainer was removed, one of the committee members later said, “we had a chance to help commute the Iowa sentence into a number of years - and then parole.”³⁴

Meanwhile, in Iowa Lainson was making life easier for his celebrity prisoner. After *In for Life* was published, Lainson made Runyon a consultant to the *Presidio* so that he could have more free time to work on other writing projects. The warden had become so convinced that Runyon should be freed that he offered to assume “the responsibility of a federal parole” if it would help convince the Justice Department. Lainson also gave Runyon his first opportunity in more than a decade to see the outside of the prison. In 1954, he gave Runyon permission to leave the prison to take photographs for the *Presidio* with a camera he had purchased the year before with royalties from

his book. By the end of 1955, Runyon had been outside the prison no fewer than six times. On one of those trips, Runyon realized how much eighteen years behind bars had changed him. The car he was riding in came to a sudden stop and Runyon, no longer used to riding in an automobile, forgot to brace himself and almost ended up in the front seat.

Despite setbacks in Washington, Gardner's campaign was gaining steam in Iowa. Several newspapers began demanding that at the very least Runyon should be allowed a hearing before the parole board, and some of Runyon's fans were becoming more confident of their chances for success. Runyon knew better. In 1950 the board had reviewed Runyon's case after being requested to do so by Governor William S. Beardsley. "Despite considerable political pressure brought from relatives and friends outside the State of Iowa," wrote the board members. "We see no reason why this man should receive any consideration for executive clemency."³⁵ In 1954, Beardsley asked the board to again look at Runyon's case. "We gave considerable time and thought to this case because of the widespread publicity this man has had as former editor of the *Presidio* and because of articles continued in the prison magazine and published in magazines of national reputation," the board replied. "This Board believes, in spite of his apparent ability and his brilliant writing, that he should be required to serve his natural life within the Penitentiary as ordered by Judge Craven. We feel he was very lucky not to have been hung," the board wrote in its seven-page opinion.³⁶

Runyon had been realistic about his chances, so he did not expect much from the newest lobbying effort. He was becoming, however, rancorous about the walls that continued to surround him. "Every now and then I'm told that my writing is too bitter. Some readers seem to feel that I should be more mellow," he noted. "Perhaps they're right. But the fact is quite often I am bitter."

"I've stood aside and watched the blundering herd parade into prison-and usually out again - and very seldom indeed have I seen a convict helped by imprisonment," he wrote. Surely, he said, society could find a better way to handle people who broke the law. "But I see few signs of a really determined hunt for that way."³⁷ In his case, for instance, the parole board had never taken the time to meet Runyon in the eleven years that had transpired since it first looked at his case. This was about to change. In 1955, the Iowa legislature enacted a law requiring the parole board to review the cases of lifers who had served more than fifteen years and interview personally each

of these inmates. After years of attacking each other in the pages of the *Presidio* and newspapers of the state, Runyon and the board would meet.

Runyon's fame seemed to work against him in the eyes of parole board members. They were eager to voice their opinions even before holding their hearing. A frequent target of their annoyance with Runyon was his autobiography. "You can search Runyon's book from cover to cover and find no real expression of remorse or contrition - nor can you find any positive statement about no further wrongful acts," said board member Virginia Bedell. "If he were reformed, would he still be so full of venom?"³⁸ The book, said chairman O. H. Henningsen, "doesn't exactly lie, but it is filled with half truths."³⁹

The public comments of the board members enraged Runyon's supporters. In March, the *Belmont Independent* wrote "[the] parole board's attitude toward Runyon is completely inexcusable."⁴⁰ The *Des Moines Register* joined the fracas with an editorial and two long articles addressing the question of granting a parole to Runyon. Runyon has shown himself to be an unusually gifted and creative individual, the *Register* said in its editorial. "The board owes it to Runyon and to itself to make certain that the unfortunate hostility that has developed between Warden Lainson and the board, and the board and Runyon over some of his writings, does not figure in its decision."⁴¹

On October 24, Runyon finally met the board. The interview lasted all of fifteen minutes. Runyon took the board's predictable decision as best he could. "I'm neither worse off nor better off than before. I'll just go on plugging and see what the future brings," he wrote to Gardner.⁴² Demand for Runyon's writing did not abate. Runyon was asked to contribute a chapter to a criminology text, and the *Decorali Public Opinion* asked him if he would write a regular column about prison life. Other newspapers had reprinted his articles, but this was a crowning achievement. He was not a freeman, but he was being offered an open, unfettered podium.

As 1957 opened, Runyon had become the country's best known prison writer, and he observed in March the twentieth anniversary of his imprisonment at Fort Madison. "Thinning hair and bi-focals those years have brought," he wrote, "but other things as well - they have brought some satisfaction and a great deal of hard work and a kind of concentration that at times make a man unconscious of passing time."

“Where did those years go?” asked Runyon. “They went into a battle for what I believe, and the other editors believed, was right.”⁴³ Runyon was now fifty-one years old. To his fellow prisoners he was a calm, confident, veteran prison lifer whom everyone knew. But underneath the polished exterior, Runyon was one of the loneliest inmates. His only steady companion over the years had been his typewriter and the acclaim it won him. Aside from Gardner, he had no friends in whom he could confide. During all of the events of 1956, Gardner had again taken the time to come to Iowa and visit Runyon. “While I by no means live in a dungeon, somehow or other the world suddenly seems much larger when you’re in the room,” Runyon wrote Gardner following the visit.⁴⁴

In April of 1957, Gardner was worried that perhaps Runyon had lost hope. “I think the most tragic thing that could happen on earth would be to give you any false hope,” Gardner wrote Runyon. “But I think it would be equally disastrous to have you feel the fight is lost.”⁴⁵ In the early morning of April 10, Less than a week after Gardner wrote those words, Runyon died of a heart attack. The prison physician, “Doc” Peiper, attended to him, but there was nothing that could be done.

The *Des Moines Register* said in an editorial about Runyon the next day, “Gardner had hoped to make of Runyon a nationwide symbol of his campaign to emphasize prison rehabilitation.” Runyon, now gone, would not be that symbol. “But through determination and the aid of a sympathetic prison administration he did show that prison need not be a place of punishment and hopelessness, but of accomplishment and hope.”⁴⁶

News of Runyon’s death traveled far. In a tribute to his influence, his obituary was carried in newspapers from the *Oskaloosa Daily Herald* to the *New York Times*. Friends and supporters wrote to Lainson and Gardner. Gardner closed his Runyon file with a terse memo. “Tom Runyon is dead.... There was no excuse for letting Tom Runyon die in prison.... Heaven knows how many persons will be discouraged from putting their feet on the comeback trail because of society’s vengeful determination to get its full pound of flesh in the case of Tom Runyon.”⁴⁷

Tom Runyon had introduced himself to the world wielding a gun but earned himself a lasting place in penal history with a typewriter. He had won his reprieve from imprisonment only in death. But in all his years, he never succumbed to the shadow cast by the prison’s walls that he so feared. And in the end, it was his magazine, the *Presidio*, that had the last word. “Thanks to

Runyon lifers in Iowa are no longer forgotten men,” wrote fellow lifer Warren Bianco. “For a man carrying two life sentences it must have been a struggle to see so many men he helped leave prison, men like Ole Lindquist and so many others. He could help everybody — except himself.”⁴⁸

**His last name is unknown, as he used only the initial N in his writings.*

Chapter 15

Yoke of Censorship

There are many sensitive, highly articulate men in the nation's prisons. ...these men are trying to reach the public through the only avenue of communication open to them, the prison press.

— Harold Stroup, editor of the *Pendleton Reflector*, 1963.

Though one of its best had died, prison journalism continued its phenomenal growth in the 1950s and into the 1960s. Only a few years after Tom Runyon died, for instance, the *Presidio* boasted of 3,500 paid outside subscribers. New publications were being started with increasing frequency in prisons around the country. Fifty-seven new publications began publishing in the 1950s, according to one survey.¹ By 1959, according to two New York University professors, “the penal press had grown to 250 publications serving an inside, as well as outside readership of two million throughout the United States and Canada.”² Though their circulation figures were generous (a more accurate assessment would put it in the six-figure range), prison publications were on the march again, as they had been in the 1930s. “The penal press is no longer a crawling infant,” said Galen Moon, editor of the *Atlantian*. “It is finding its legs and voice.”³

Those publications that had been closed during the war also resumed publishing. For example, at the Menard branch of the Illinois state prison system, the *Menard Time*, which had suspended publication in 1943, was out again, this time in a handsome tabloid-sized format. Within a few years, under the editorship of a talented young inmate, the Time’s circulation grew, reaching as high as 7,500, with copies going to all fifty states and twenty-six countries.

“Many well-managed prisons have arrived at the conviction that time spent in planning and writing stories helps both inmate and prison, for a

prisoner pounding away at a typewriter for hours, or pushing reluctant pencil over paper, is too busy to dig a tunnel under the walls or fashion bludgeons for use in a riot,” predicted Herman Spector, a prison librarian and supporter of the penal press, in 1945.⁴ Despite Spector’s postwar optimism, the presence of *Time* was of no help in warding off a riot at Menard in 1952. The riot was part of an epidemic of unrest that rocked American prisons in 1952. Beginning with a riot in the South Dakota prison in Sioux Falls, the violent uprisings swept through twenty-three prisons before the end of the year. At Menard, officials were quick to apportion the blame. “Some correctional authorities said the newspaper was instrumental in the riots and urged its removal,” said Russell Baird, author of the *Penal Press*. Warden Jerome Munie closed *Time* down. He “accused the paper of causing part of the problems,” recalled Dave Saunders, who was then the *Time*’s feature editor. The paper had not been sufficiently deferential to his authority. Saunders recalled Munie once coming to the paper’s office with an editorial from an outside newspaper that he wanted reprinted in the *Time*. “The editor refused to print it, and he fired him. He gave it to the assistant editor and he refused to print it, and he fired him,” said Saunders. “He gave up before he got down to me.”⁵

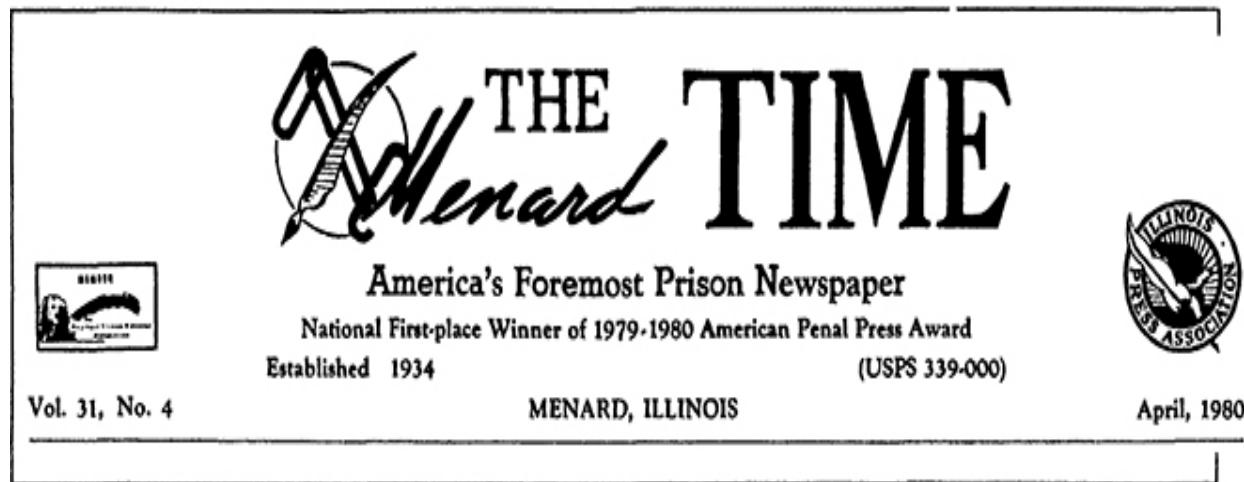
Following the riot at Menard, Governor William G. Stratton appointed Ross V. Randolph as warden. “He came there with the recommendation that the paper be shut down,” said Saunders. But an old newspaperman who supervised the inmate’s print shop talked him out of it. Instead Randolph called Saunders to his office and told him, “I am going to give you a chance to run a real newspaper.” Saunders was not only overjoyed at the news of the paper’s reprieve but excited by the opportunity that the warden had presented to him.

Saunders was twenty years old at the time. He had been sentenced in 1950 at the age of eighteen to forty years for murder. He decided to make the revamped *Time* similar to a community newspaper, “if you can look upon prison as a community.” One difference, however, was that Saunders wanted to also aim the paper toward readers outside the prison. He said, “I wanted it to be something that people on the outside would read and get an idea about prison life,” he said, “but also put prisoners in the best light while still being honest about it.”

Saunders was not alone in this sentiment. In other prisons, inmates were increasingly looking toward their penal publication as a means to counter

what they saw as the unsympathetic portrait drawn of them by outside newspapers during this period of prison turmoil. "The public knows very little about prison life and most of that little is not so," wrote Jon Patashus, editor of the Connecticut prison's *Monthly Record*.⁶ Nina Mermey, who read volumes of prison publications in the early 1950s for an article she published in the *American Mercury*, said "It is only natural that prison writers try to put their best prison-issue foot forward.... [I]n most articles that present inmate problems, it is obvious that the writer has taken a deep breath and counted, not to ten, but more likely to a hundred and ten, before ever touching a typewriter."⁷

This kind of restraint was on Saunders's mind when he assumed the post of editor. "I didn't see that running a rabble-rousing newspaper was going to help with the public at all," he said.⁸ Rather he turned the paper's efforts toward publishing well-researched articles on subjects like the state's parole laws and campaigning to reform them. At the time, the prisoner who had relatives and friends waiting to help and a job offer outside was given parole and supervisory assistance. However, the inmate who was friendless and without any job prospects served his full sentence and then was left at the prison's gate with a new suit and twenty-five dollars. The inmate who most needed help was essentially abandoned by the state's parole system.



The *Menard Time* tried to make itself look like a small-town newspaper, but it was clear to anyone who read it that its subscribers were hardly the small town type.

The *Time*'s article on the discrepancy in the law came to the attention of then state senator Paul Simon. "I wouldn't have known about the need but for

the newspaper," he recalled years later when in Congress. The article led him to push through the state legislature a bill creating a system of conditional release for all prisoners. "The result was an improvement in the Illinois penal system all because of that newspaper," he said.⁹

Meanwhile Southern Illinois University (SIU) became interested in the work of the prison journalists. In 1956, for the first time in any prison, the university offered at Menard a college course in journalism for credit. Thirty inmates signed up to take the course taught by Charles C. Clayton of SIU's faculty.¹⁰ "The thought was that a better and improved newspaper would help with the various conditions in that prison," explained Manion Rice of the university journalism school.¹¹ A decade later, the university organized a national penal press contest that lasted for twenty-five years as a sort of Pulitzer Prize contest of journalism behind bars. (See Appendix I.)

The *Time* met with great success under Saunders, becoming the nation's most prominent prison newspaper in the 1950s. "Menard Prison's eight-page, tabloid-sized monthly newspaper is one of the best of some two hundred publications produced by and for convicts," acclaimed *Time* magazine in 1959.¹² The success of the *Menard Time* (named not for Henry Luce's *Time* but for what prisoners spend behind walls) came to help Saunders. In 1960, the Governor commuted his sentence, making him eligible for parole. In 1961 he was released. After a short stint working on the *Troy Tribune* he was made editor of the *Carterville Herald*. Several years later he resigned his newspaper position to become a public information officer at Southern Illinois University.



Nightkeeper

Published weekly in THE SPECTATOR, inmate written and edited newspaper at Southern Michigan Prison, Nightkeeper's Report has been acclaimed the most widely printed prison feature in the nation's 190 member Penal Press. Penned in neat Spencerian script by nightkeeper John

H. Purves in the 1880's, the day-to-day reports chronicled occurrences within the dark and gloomy confines of the prison. Today the reports are dust laden, worn and fragile. But entries abound in a crisply written and entertaining report of nights behind bars.

January 9, 1985—Guard Hawley reports Hannibal, "the Bear," for doing exercises in his cell, and being insolent when he explained that daily calisthenics were necessary in order to retain his superb muscular development. "It's this way, Cap," he said. "You run this prison with your brain, but a lumberjack has to depend upon his strength. I exercise to keep in condition." This sounded like pretty level-headed reasoning to me, so I let him off after reprimanding him for his insolence to Guard Hawley. He goes to work in the flour mill, tomorrow.

January 10,—Hannibal, "the Bear," no sooner reached the flour mill and started to work when a fight broke out between Smith, No. 1300, and John Fields, No. 1318, the two regular mill hands. Guard Bannister tried to part the two men and ordered Hannibal to assist him. This was a mistake, because Hannibal promptly jumped into the melee and beat both of the convicts severely. This unfortunate occurrence is the fault of the officer who should have summoned help instead of relying upon another convict. I have referred the matter to the Deputy and suspended the guard until the matter is brought to the attention of the Deputy.

The penal press frequently reprinted items from each other's pages. One of the most widely reprinted features was the *Nightkeeper's Report*, originally published in the *Spectator* at Southern Michigan State Prison. The daily reports, composed in the 1880s, were eventually also published as a book. This reprint is taken from the January 1980 *Menard Time*.

The *Menard Time* wasn't the only prison periodical to gain considerable notice during this period through well-researched studies into those areas not forbidden by the yoke of censorship. The federal prison publications were greatly revived. At McNeil Island, the *Island Lantern* had declined from its auspicious start in the 1920s. In 1959, Lester Price, who had been in and out of correctional institutions since he was twelve, was sent to McNeil. With some experience at printing, he set about to revive the *Lantern*. An old offset press was enlisted, and with Price's "inquiring and creative mind" the "*Lantern* began an impressive comeback," according to McNeil historian Paul Keve.¹³

At Alderson, West Virginia, the *Eagle*, one of the nation's few women-inmate publications, was being widely circulated. In fact, one issue in particular gathered considerable notice. It seemed that prison officials requested that Elizabeth Gurley Flynn, an American communist incarcerated under the Smith Act, pen a "patriotic article" on the Declaration of Independence for the July 4 edition of the *Eagle*. Flynn's article, a rather straightforward, factual account, appeared. Certain ironic portions of the work, such as the statement that it was the duty of citizens to protect the Bill of Rights, were lost on prison officials but not all readers. Someone sent *New York Post* columnist Murray Kempton a copy of the *Eagle*. He immediately pounced on the prison authorities. "He could only marvel," wrote Flynn biographer Helen Camp, "that both she and the authorities thought it appropriate for her to write such a piece and that a prisoner that 'is regarded by all parole boards as unrepentant and therefore unfit for mercy ... is only fit to tell federal prisoners why they should love America.'"¹⁴

At Leavenworth, the *New Era* was also undergoing a renaissance. There inmate-journalists surveyed seven hundred inmates who admitted to having juvenile records to see what factors they ascribed to causing their delinquency. "The result, as credible a piece of journalism as an editor could ask for, turned up a wealth of statistical data, dissolved more than one myth, and made informative reading for anyone interested in the interplay of character and environment," wrote James Fixx in *Saturday Review* in 1963.¹⁵

While preparing his article, Fixx also polled prison editors on the ten best prison periodicals (see Table 15.1). Overwhelmingly the inmates selected the *Atlantian* as their favorite. The *Atlantian* that won their praise had evolved greatly since the days when Morris “Red” Rudensky used it to promote the inmates’ contribution to defeating Hitler. In the early 1960s, under the editorship of Paul Clark, the magazine had begun tackling subjects previously considered too sensitive for most prison periodicals. One issue, for instance, featured an article on the absence of women. “Sex is not a sin to the prisoner, but lack of sex is hell,” wrote Clark. He suggested conjugal visits as a remedy.¹⁶

Clark, who was serving a twenty-five-year sentence for armed robbery, had been more successful than previous editors in making the *Atlantian* worthwhile reading. “Filled with photographs and drawings and lavishly laced with color, it covers an impressive range of ideas and activities inside and outside the penitentiary walls,” said Fixx.¹⁷ It was more, however, than nice printing and illustrations. “The contents of each issue put it at the top of the list,” said William Larkins, editor of the *Lake Shore Outlook* at Indiana State Prison.¹⁸

Top Ten Prison Publications, 1963

1. *Atlantian*, United States Penitentiary, Atlanta, GA
2. *Presidio*, Iowa State Penitentiary, Fort Madison, IA
3. *New Era*, United States Penitentiary, Leavenworth, KS
4. *Mentor*, Massachusetts Correctional Institution, South Walpole, MA
5. *Lake Shore Outlook*, Indiana State Prison, Michigan City, IN
6. *Raiford Record*, Florida State Prison, Raiford, FL
7. *Menard Time*, Illinois State Penitentiary, Menard, IL
8. *Spectator*, South Michigan Prison, Jackson, MI
9. *Pendleton Reflector*, Indiana Reformatory, Pendleton, IN
10. *Enchanted News*, Penitentiary of New Mexico, Santa Fe, NM

Honorable Mention:

The Courier, Maryland Penitentiary, Baltimore, MD

The Folsom Observer, Folsom State Prison, CA

The Harbinger, Kansas State Industrial Reformatory, Hutchinson, KS

Prison editors selected these publications as the best of the prison press in 1963 (*Saturday Review*, March 9, 1963)

Like other prison editors, Clark produced the *Atlantian* under difficult conditions. One of the most vexing was the high turnover in his staff. He had twenty-two inmates working under him (only one worked full-time), but still it was difficult to keep any consistency. "Just when I got a man trained, wham! He's released and I have to start all over," complained the art editor.¹⁹

One of his best artists who left in the early 1960s was Soviet spy Rudolf Abel. Colonel Abel was the highest-ranking Soviet spy ever convicted of espionage in the United States. In 1957 when federal agents raided his New York studio, they found a lot more than paintbrushes and canvases. Among his artists' tools they discovered hollowed-out pencils, coins, and cufflinks that he used to hide microfilmed defense data. Sentenced to thirty years in the Atlanta Federal Penitentiary, Abel now found plenty of time to paint, and the *Atlantian* put him to work as one of their staff artists. His illustrations were soon a regular feature of the magazine, but in 1962 he was returned to his native country in the middle of the night in exchange for Francis Gary Powers, the U-2 pilot who had been shot down over the Soviet Union.

Many of Atlanta's inmates had pride in the quarterly, realizing the constraints under which it operated. "These guys know how far they can go before they get their butts in a hole," one inmate told *Newsweek*. "You wouldn't expect them to let [the *Atlantian*] run an article on a do-it-yourself Molotov cocktail."²⁰ Some of Clark's readers, however, did criticize him for making the *Atlantian* too intellectual. One vocal critic was Tom Whiteside, editor of Louisiana's *Angolite*. He argued that "the *Atlantian* had gone over to the sociologists, the theorists ... it no more reflects prison life than Kant or St. Thomas reflected the lives of common people in their ages."²¹

Atlantian staffers took exception to Whiteside's criticism. "We're not trying to put out a pitch sheet," said associate editor John Howard. "Some prison magazines are like that. We think that *Atlantian* can do more by going beyond just listing problems. You have to offer solutions." On the whole, the *Atlantian*'s principal readers seemed to have agreed with that approach. "The *Atlantian* must be well received," noted a prison official. "We don't find the commodes jammed up with torn copies."²²

Only two of the newspapers on Fixx's Hst of the top ten prison publications were published weekly. One of them, the *Pendleton Reflector*, was attracting considerable attention among prison journalists because of its campaigns against the death penalty and solitary confinement and to eliminate the use of ex-convict. "Effective this date, we are adopting the policy of deleting the term ex-convict from all material," said the editors of the *Reflector* in 1959. "We feel that the viciousness of the term ex-convict is to such a great extent that it deprives the released prisoner of a fair opportunity to once again live as an average citizen."²³

In 1966, the *Reflector* also became the envy of many prison journalists when the state's corrections department abolished all forms of censorship. "We are watching the new progress and reforms that your new Commissioner is putting into effect and each copy of your paper is read very closely in hopes that your fellows will lead the way for great changes everywhere," said Iowa's *Presidio*.²⁴

In its own editorial, published on the front page, the *Reflector* promised "this is a freedom that will not be abused, under pressure, by critics and cynics."²⁵ The change was apparent when in succeeding issues the paper published articles about a riot at the Indiana Girls' School, two escape attempts, and a murder. The editorial freedom in Indiana did not last long. By 1970, inmate-editors at the state's other noted prison newspaper, the *Lake Shore Outlook*, published at the state prison, were required to submit all their copy to the warden prior to publication.

Despite apparent success, notice in the nation's press, and exceptions such as the *Reflector*, most inmate-journalists continued to face considerable amounts of censorship through the 1950s, 1960s, and 1970s. Censorship had always been regarded as the prerogative of prison administrators. "Most of us as individuals," said one official at a 1940 American Prison Congress, "believe it necessary and justifiable to censor any material that passes through the prisoners' hands."²⁶ "Practically all wardens will suppress publication of a prison paper, on a moment's notice, at the least provocation," noted an inmate editor in 1951.²⁷

Censorship of the *Menard Time*, for example, was mandated by the state. "We had to send page proofs to Springfield, to the state office, to be censored," recalled Saunders. "But in all the time I was editor, from 1952 to 1961, we had only one item censored." The item, he explained, was a story about a group of guards who shot a large flock of starlings that were causing a nuisance at the prison. Even though the story was a simple, straight-forward account of the shooting, officials feared it would earn them the wrath of bird lovers.²⁸

Sometimes, though, censorship was exercised in more serious cases. In 1954, for instance, a prison newspaper at the southern Michigan prison published on the front page the name of an informant whose tip had led to the capture of thirteen escapees. Prison officials seized and destroyed the issue and had inmates print another edition without the item.²⁹ Even Runyon's *Presidio* was not exempted from capricious censorship. Six

months after his death editors of the magazine were told by officials that it could no longer be critical of any state agency or individual. The directive came after the *Presidio* published an article revealing that when six of their readers wrote letters to one state agency asking about one specific inmate they received six different, often misleading, replies. “We have ... been accused of stirring up mistrust of certain agencies. The fact is that the magazine was a publication of prisoners, not a front for state officials; presenting prisoners’ views, not forming them,” the editors angrily wrote in a special editorial after receiving the directive. “There never was any trust of those agencies and we reflected that attitude. How could prisoners — or anyone — possibly trust people who didn’t trust them?” The censorship directive was a deadly blow to the magazine. With it, wrote the editors, “we withdraw from the topmost ranks of penal publications and sink to the bottom of the heap where censored publications belong.”³⁰

The arm of censorship was not always so visible. “Censorship is often denied by officials in high places, and the unwary analyst who understandably believes what he is told is not to blame when he misses such censorship,” noted Runyon’s co-editor, Lloyd Eddy, a few years earlier. “Quite often inmate editors who operate under crippling censorship continue plugging along, trying in even a small way to bring enlightenment to anyone who can sort the truth from the verbal garbage among which it is hidden.”³¹

Most frustrating for the growing fourth estate behind bars was that officials were not uniform in their application of censorship. Some prisons, such as Atlanta and Fort Madison, had allowed their inmate-editors to work under increasingly looser reins. Other officials severely restricted their inmate publications. “In some cases the censorship is so rigid,” noted Whiteside, “that the writing is like carved ice.”³²

The *Prison Mirror* had by the late 1960s become a good example of Whiteside’s complaint. A biweekly, the *Mirror* was now the oldest continuously published inmate newspaper in the country. The *Summary* and other early prototypes of prison papers were vanishing. But over the years, the *Mirror* had changed greatly. It was now a small sheet of four to six pages. Gone was the large, thick predecessor. And although the *Mirror* rarely missed an issue, it no longer reported much of what really went on behind the walls of the Minnesota prison. A typical issue in 1966, for example, featured stories on prisoners who had sent a letter to Washington asking why they couldn’t be allowed to fight in Vietnam, prisoners who were having an

art exhibit, a gift of a thousand dollars from General Mills for a correspondence course, and the twelfth annual Alcoholics Anonymous dinner. Unlike in its early years when it had been unrestrained, by the late 1960s and early 1970s the *Mirror* was strictly censored. In fact, inmates had taken to calling the ninety-year-old publication the “good news newspaper.”

“In a sense there may be some basis for that remark,” admitted the editor in 1973, “because we are censored and after being told to ‘waster-basket’ pieces which involved considerable effort, one learns what is considered ‘taboo’ by the administration, which not only owns the paper lock stock and barrel, they ‘temporarily’ own the editor’s body.”³³

Inmate-editors were not complaisant about the censorship, but there was little they could do. A few did try though. Editor Norman Mastrian, for example, took his resistance to censorship to the *Mirror* editorial page in 1972. Mastrian, who had a journalism degree, told his readers “the fact that no editorial written by the editor of this publication relevant to the issues of concern to the men in this prison appears in this issue does not mean none was written.” The *Mirror*, he explained, had attempted to publish editorials on matters important to the inmates, including administration policy. “From time to time we have been denied permission to publish those views which were at odds with those of the administration. We feel that administrators of public institutions have no valid right to deny publication of any view which happens to be contrary to their own,” he wrote.³⁴

Another time, two years later, acting temporarily as editor, John Henkes refused to reword some offending paragraphs. Instead he blacked them out, wrote reporter Mary Peterson. This produced “a graphically interesting souvenir issue of the *Mirror* and the firing of Henkes.”³⁵

Being editor of the modern *Mirror* is still fraught with difficulties. Much like “walking a tightrope,” said Harley Sorenson, a former editor who after being released went to work for the *Minneapolis Tribune*. Sorenson himself fell victim to the difficult conditions. After only two years as editor of the *Mirror* he had been fired. “My editorials were too pushy, they said,” he explained.³⁶

In the news department the prison authorities were no less strict. “If somebody stabs somebody we’re not allowed to touch it,” explained editor J. Allen Robertson in 1981. “Reporting on crime inside the prison walls is taboo. Anything controversial is taboo.”³⁷ For example, the *Mirror* wanted to publish an inmate’s winning entry in an art contest that had been

sponsored by *Hustler* magazine, a publication replete with photographs of naked women in revealing positions. The painting featured a naked woman, with smaller pictures in the background of couples fornicating. The administration decided, in this case, that if the picture was to be published, the background would have to be washed out. It was, and an edited version was published. Explained a prison official, “we can’t just ignore public standards in those areas.”³⁸

Inmate-writers coped with the increasing censorship in a variety of ways. At the *Lake Shore Outlook* in 1969, the warden killed an editorial by inmate Mike Misenheimer already in galleys, calling for prison reform following a recent prison disturbance. The inmate-journalists quickly ran off copies of the editorial before printing the expunged issue and circulated it before officials were able to stop them. “Thus Mike Misenheimer’s editorial ‘The Real Grievance’ served as an example for both official censorship and the underground publication within prison walls,” said Michael Cooney, who studied the inmate press of Indiana.³⁹ Going underground became an increasingly viable alternative. By 1969, Cooney reported that there were a number of underground newspapers in Indiana prisons, usually published by black radical organizations. That year, *Outlook* editor Jack Griswold and his colleagues used another tactic to get their uncensored words into print. They smuggled their best writing out of the prison, and Holt, Rinehart & Winston published it in book form. The action, however, led to the end of the *Outlook*.

Where censorship was especially heavy, the underground papers often were the only ones with accurate information. In 1972, rumors were circulating among the inmates of the federal penitentiary at Lewisburg, Pennsylvania, that a strike against the prison industries was brewing. Strikes had broken out at other prisons around the country since the Attica riots the summer before, so both inmates and prison officials took the rumor seriously. For Joel Meyers, a draft resister who edited and produced Lewisburg’s underground newspaper, the rumor was good news. An activist in the prison, Meyers published *First Step* as an alternative to bland official prison newspaper the *Friday Flyer*. Using the carbon paper given to inmates for completing legal documents, Meyers made four copies of his twelve to twenty-four-page paper each week. Each copy was given to other inmates who would make four more copies and so on. This process would continue until eighty or so copies made their rounds through the penitentiary.

When talk of the strike began, Meyers was publishing an edition of his *First Step*. Among the first to get a copy of that week's edition was the warden, according to journalist Ben Bagdikian, author of *Caged*. The edition, with the headline "The Whole Federal System - On Strike!" was on his desk within an hour of its appearance. It told the warden a lot more about what was on the minds of his inmates than the *Friday Flyer*.⁴⁰

There was, however, yet another alternative for prison-journalists, as inmates of the notorious Angola prison in Louisiana were to discover.

Chapter 16

Bayou Style

True, we didn't have the in-depth story we originally wanted to get, but the thought of that sun beaming down on the earth with a vengeance and that inescapable dust that finds its way into every opening of your body.... We concluded that we felt basically the same way about the field as does the bulk of the convicts here.... If you don't have to be there, you try like hell to avoid it. So, shelving our journalistic zeal, we did like any other convict given the opportunity-we split. To hell with it!

— Wilbert Rideau and Billy Sinclair,
writing about the inmates who work the fields
surrounding the Angola prison,
Angolite September/October 1979

One March evening in 1980 some of the biggest names in journalism gathered at the Roosevelt Hotel in New York City. The occasion was the annual George Polk Award ceremonies. Established in 1949 in memory of the CBS correspondent who was killed while covering the Greek Civil War, the Polk Award was considered one of the most prestigious journalism prizes next to the Pulitzer.

Among the winners were many familiar television faces, radio voices, and newspaper bylines. But most of the curiosity that year was about two journalists who had won the Polk Award for Special Interest Reporting. Since the winners had been announced in February, the two had been interviewed in NBC and CBS evening newscasts and written up in *Time* and other national publications. But that night their award was to be presented to them in absentia. It was not that the two had not wanted to attend, nor had their work precluded their attending. Rather, as convicted murderers serving life sentences in Louisiana's State Penitentiary at Angola, the two were hardly permitted to travel to New York. In their stead the prison's warden and his associate accepted the prize. It was the first time the award was ever given to prisoners in its thirty-two-year history. In fact, it was the first time

in all of penal journalism's history that this award was bestowed on a prison journalist.

THE ANGOLITE

THE PRISON NEWSMAGAZINE



No other publication in the two centuries of prison publishing was as hard-hitting, unfettered, and successful as the *Angolite* published at Louisiana's State Prison.

Over the previous couple of years this scene had become a familiar one at journalism award ceremonies. In May of 1979, for example, the warden flew to Washington to receive the duo's Robert F. Kennedy Journalism Award at the home of Mrs. Robert Kennedy. Three months later, he was back on a plane this time flying to Dallas to pick up their Silver Gavel Award from the American Bar Association. Again, both prizes had never before been bestowed to convicts. So, by the evening in March of 1980, Louisiana corrections officials were becoming used to flying off and standing in for the pair at such ceremonies.

But for Wilbert Rideau and Billy Sinclair, editors of the prize-winning magazine the *Angolite*, the significance of their journalistic triumph was still dawning on them. It had only begun to sink in when a *New York Times* correspondent writing an article about the pair after winning the Polk prize asked them, "Do you mean to tell me that you don't realize what you've won?" They soon did, as vans, cars, planes, and even helicopters ferrying national reporters began to arrive at the prison. One helicopter, in fact, almost caused a disaster by landing in the middle of the prison complex rather than the small airstrip to the south. Luckily for the NBC news crew on board, noted Rideau, "they landed in the Trustee Yard rather than the Big Yard, where they would have probably come under a hail of gunfire from the tower guards."¹

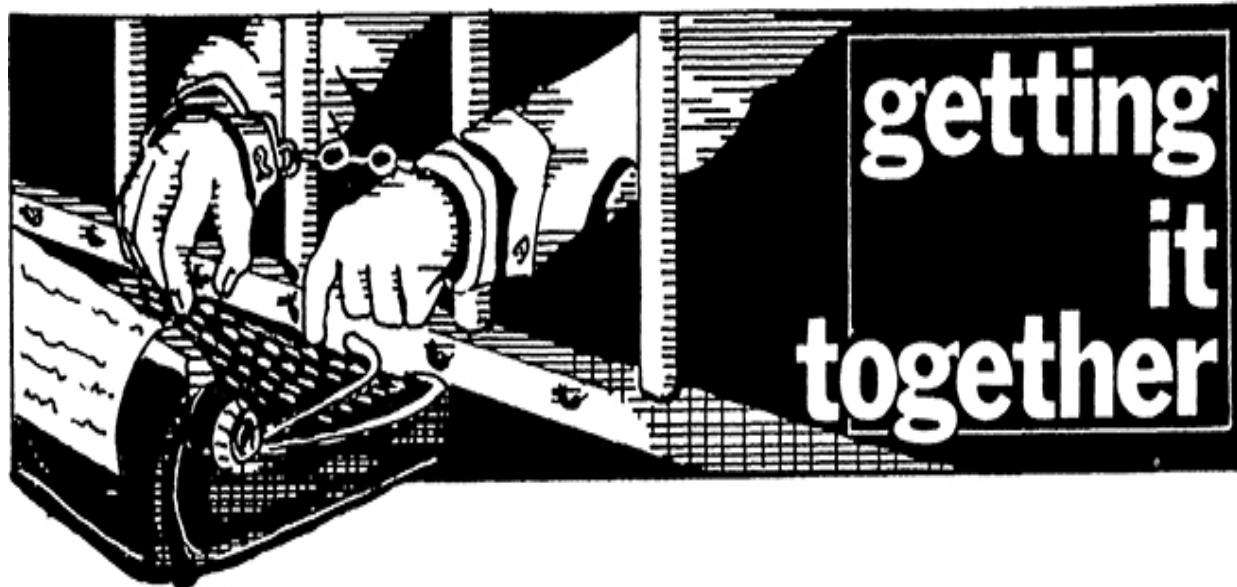
The *Angolite*'s remarkable Odyssey took the formerly lackluster prison magazine to national fame. Its starting point was a court order six years before. In 1974, a U.S. district court judge ordered the state to end the rampant violence at Angola and improve the living conditions for the inmates. The order came as no surprise. From 1972 to 1975 at least 40 prisoners had died from knife wounds and another 350 had been dangerously wounded. Only the prisoners on death row felt any degree of safety. Many of the inmates took to tying Sears Roebuck catalogs to their chests to protect them from knifings while they slept. Sinclair recalled sitting in his dormitory typing when an inmate chased another down the aisle brandishing a knife. "The blood went all over the typewriter, all over my letter, all over my bed," he said.²

The violence that racked Angola dated back to the days when the bend in the Mississippi River was a plantation worked by slaves from the Portuguese

colony of Angola. After the Civil War the eighteen-thousand acre plantation became the state's prison. Conditions were no better for the inmates than they had been for the slaves who had preceded them. Between 1870 and 1900, for example, "about three thousand men, women and children convicts were said to have died here from overwork, exposure or murder," noted one report.³

In 1975, under the watch of marksmen, surrounded on three sides by the Mississippi and its treacherous currents and on the other by a swamp infested with snakes, Angola's prisoners witnessed the first major improvements at the "Alcatraz of the South." In the fall a small blue twin-engine plane piloted by C. Paul Phelps, the deputy director of the Department of Corrections, landed at Angola's small airstrip. He had come from Baton Rouge to take over as acting warden of the prison. "Traditionally an official in the prison hierarchy had always been moved up to assume such duties," noted the *Angolite* several years later. "But not this time. The number two man in the department was taking over the reins, a bold departure from tradition. It was an omen of things to come."⁴

Phelps, who had a background in juvenile work, spent his first days at the prison learning all he could about the place. Rarely could he be found in his office; instead he was usually wandering around the penitentiary talking with inmates and guards. Unlike previous wardens, he was not bound by traditional ideas about how to run a prison. Rather he was open to new ideas, and with the court order as an imperative, he began making sweeping changes.



Detail from the *Angolite*, 1980s.

Among the first changes Phelps wanted was to install, in the words of the *Angolite*, “a credible vehicle of information in a place traditionally ruled by rumor.”⁵ There had been an inmate newspaper for years, but like many other such publications it had been precluded from reporting anything beyond Jaycee news. Phelps decided to give the publication editorial freedom of the like that had never before been granted in a penitentiary. The *Angolite* would now be free to investigate, photograph, and publish whatever it wanted. The only restrictions, he said, would be that it would not be permitted to criticize prison employees who were not in policy-making positions and that it would be required to exercise some restraint in using prison jargon. Phelps hoped that his bold move would enable the publication to become “a vehicle for communication between the inmates and the administration.”⁶ When one of the inmate-editors suggested that it might not work, Phelps shrugged his shoulders and replied “Let’s try it, and see what happens.”⁷

While Phelps was granting the *Angolite* this unprecedented freedom, Wilbert Rideau, a black lifer, was again applying for a job on the magazine’s staff. Two years earlier Rideau had been turned down. *The Angolite*, as he put it, was then “an all-white situation.”⁸ They did not have any blacks on the staff, the magazine editors told him, because they could not find any who knew how to write. Rideau, who describes himself as a racial jambalaya, decided that if the all-white publication did not want him, he would start an

all-black paper and do it better. With the help of other black inmates and a stash of pilfered paper he began publishing the *Lifer Magazine*. The *Lifer* quickly gained an outside circulation of over two thousand and was smuggled out of the prison and sold in churches throughout the state. “We got a lot of attention behind that little paper,” said Rideau.⁹

One person whose attention the *Lifer* attracted was an editor for a southern chain of newspapers. He signed up Rideau to write a weekly column about prison life called The Jungle which ran for about a year in Mississippi and Louisiana newspapers. Using his new notoriety, Rideau sold an article about imprisoned veterans to *Penthouse* magazine. Having certified his writing ability, Rideau was back again in the *Angolite*’s office seeking a job. This time Phelps granted his request, and Rideau was given a position on the now-integrated staff of the prison magazine. Soon after the editor departed and Rideau took over.

Rideau had been in Angola since 1962, when he was sentenced to die at the age of nineteen for the murder of a bank teller during a holdup. After having his conviction overturned three times and being convicted again in each of his new trials, Rideau’s sentence was finally commuted to life following the U.S. Supreme Court’s decision striking down capital punishment in 1972.

It was while on death row that Rideau first became interested in writing. “I started writing poems; that’s what the average prisoner does,” he said.¹⁰ But Rideau also began to read anything he could get his hands on. He obtained books by Sigmund Freud, Mortimer Adler, and others, first through surreptitious means then when the death row rules were relaxed, through the prison library. By the time he was released from death row, Rideau had written one book about his theories of criminality and two novels. Another death-row inmate who benefited from the High Court’s decision was Billy Sinclair. He and Rideau had been friends since they first met in a parish jail in 1965 when Rideau organized a protest over the mistreatment of a white prisoner-Sinclair.

While Rideau had applied himself to studying human behavior and writing on death row, Sinclair had studied law. By the time Sinclair was released into the prison’s general population he had acquired a reputation as a sharp jailhouse lawyer. The reputation stemmed from the success of one of his lawsuits which gained recreation and exercise privileges for the men on

death row. “I consider myself,” he said, “a jailhouse lawyer who has some talent to write.”¹¹

Appointed editor of the *Angolite*, Rideau persuaded the administration to make Sinclair his assistant editor. Together the pair began to use the license given to them by Phelps. “Nineteen seventy-six was an uncertain year,” they later wrote. “It was the year the *Angolite* broke away from traditional prison journalism, striking out for new frontiers, for something better, more realistic and meaningful. It was a year of experimenting.”¹² But it took more than Phelps’s promise of no censorship for the magazine to start poking around in a world where secrets had been habitually kept from the outside. It took judicious use of their skills. “We went through some dangerous moments that first year,” recalled Rideau.¹³

Early stories were carefully mapped out. Certain subjects were postponed. But by patient and persistent work, Rideau and Sinclair managed to extend slowly outward the limits of what a prison publication was able to publish. They accomplished this by scrupulously establishing the *Angolite*’s independence. Though the magazine was under the supervision of the warden’s office, it belonged neither to the administration nor to the inmates or any clique of the prison population. “This is the only neutral, independent office in the prison,” said Rideau. Warring faction leaders, for example, had come in and gone out of the *Angolite*’s office within minutes of each other, he said.¹⁴

In order to achieve this independence, the two inmate-journalists had rejected the prison’s dominant culture and placed themselves in a sort of “no-man’s land.” This was not without its risks, though. Anything viewed as an attack on the criminal “ethic,” explained Rideau, was viewed by many prisoners as a personal attack. “When you make a decision to do something like that, you take a chance,” he noted.¹⁵ Many inmates are not likely to understand. In fact, the prison experience often reinforces a convict’s criminality. They talked about how much dope they’d sell and how many women they’d pimp for when they got out, said Rideau. “I can’t really carry on much of a conversation with those guys anymore.... Hell, I want to be a good novelist.... Billy has the same problem.... They laughed at him for wanting to go to law school.”¹⁶

Still, to do their job, they had to talk to the inmates. That they did, day after day, as they roamed freely about the prison working sources and researching stories. The sight of the two, Rideau with a camera and Sinclair

with a notepad, became a familiar one in the prison's many corridors. The camera they carried, Rideau believed, prevented many of the abuses of the past. The prison employees were not enthusiastic about the roving reporters. Phelps admitted that it disturbed some of his staff to have to answer questions put to them by inmates. "They never had to do this before," he said.¹⁷

Answering questions from the pair was also difficult for prisoners, whose previous experience with questioning was usually at the hands of police or prosecutors. "Prisoners don't traditionally like to give up the information," Sinclair explained. "So a lot of times we have to work with prisoners maybe five, six, seven, eight months before we can get a particular angle or particular information that we want." For example, the success of one of their earlier stories, which detailed the nature and extent of sex in the prison, hinged on finding inmates willing to publicly tell their story. "It takes a hell of a lot for a guy to get up and say he was raped, or he was a slave to another guy for years and years and years," said Rideau. "But we were able to get people to talk."¹⁸

The two were almost inseparable in their work. "The unusual thing about the *Angolite*," noted Rideau, "is that we all think alike." Sinclair and Rideau worked together from early morning to late evening, sometimes as late as midnight, and then they returned to the same dormitory, where they bunked together. The two did not observe normal prison routines and often ate their meals in their small sunlit office at the end of a corridor in the main prison complex. The two, in fact, had a number of unusual privileges. State officials, for instance, allowed the pair to venture out of the prison with a guard to cover a story. In addition the two could make regular use of a telephone. For all their efforts in researching, writing, and photographing stories and then typing and laying out the magazine, Rideau and Sinclair figured they earned about five cents an hour.

What the pair accomplished differed from what all other prison journalists did. Their articles often ran in excess often thousand words. As a result of its copious documentation, the magazine became the single most influential inmate force within the Louisiana prison system. "We are not power brokers in the traditional sense. We can't do that," explained Rideau. "What we have is the ability to influence people."¹⁹ Once, for example, their hard work resulted in the release of an inmate. In an article about long-term inmates, the *Angolite* highlighted the case of Frank Moore, who after spending thirty-

three years in prison was overlooked by the bureaucracy of the corrections department. Following the publicity generated by the *Angolite* article, the Board of Pardons requested his prison record and shortly thereafter voted to release him.

Equally important to the power the magazine gave the two inmate-journalists was the fame it brought them. Some 1,700 outsiders, including judges and politicians, read their work in its first years. The *Angolite* also came to be part of journalism award ceremonies around the country. “When these pros [outside journalists] tell you that you are good—that feels good,” admitted Rideau.²⁰ In addition, he and Sinclair made no secret that they viewed the *Angolite* as their eventual ticket to freedom, because the only way out of prison for the pair of lifers was if the Board of Pardons and the governor decided to free them.

Though their best work was produced jointly, they each had their own enormous talent as journalists. In “Anatomy of a Suicide,” for instance, Sinclair revealed his talent in a moving but independent account of a convicted murderer’s suicide. He killed himself in part because he chastised himself for lacking the courage to shoot one of his witnesses. “He felt the ultimate act of courage is when a man can take his own life with complete awareness of what he is doing,” wrote Sinclair.²¹ So, after making Sinclair, who was in the next cell, promise not to alert the authorities, he slashed his wrists. As he bled to death he talked with Sinclair about the important things in his life. The resulting article so moved the inmate population that hardly any noticed that the same issue featured an interview with a hated district attorney.

Where Sinclair’s style was lawyerly, with stories crafted as carefully as one would assemble a brief, Rideau had more of the flourish and assurance of a mature writer. In the cover story of the March/April 1979 issue, “The Other Side of Murder,” Rideau took readers into the dark recesses of Angola where the electric chair was kept. He opened his lengthy article with the tale of a bar owner’s murder in a nearby community and the arrival on death row of his two convicted killers. To set the mood, Rideau dipped into his own memory to render a sense of what it must have felt like for the two young men. “Most of us had never given much thought to the electric chair,” he wrote, “but that first day on death row made it jump into our thoughts like an eclipse of horror.”

“Each man was placed in a gray-and-white cell.... When the cell door slammed shut behind the condemned man, he would feel completely alone in a different world.... The pressure of time seemed confused and lost.... The condemned man would grip his cell bars just to have something solid to hold on to. He would stare out across the prison yard at the trees rooted in the lonely hillside, not really realizing that the scene would become a fixture in his mind’s eye,” wrote Rideau.

After giving a graphic history of the electric chair, including the story of one condemned man who was not killed by the chair the first time and had to wait another whole year before the state put him back on the chair and succeeded in ending his life, Rideau brought his narrative back to the day in September of 1970 when the date of the execution for the bar owner’s killers was announced. “We resented the execution date,” wrote Rideau in explaining the kinds of considerations that surface in a man on death row, “not because we felt compassion for Jessie James [Washington] or Louis [Haller] behind any noble idea of opposing capital punishment, rather because it brought death’s brutal presence into our futile isolated lives.”²²

It was, however, when Rideau and Sinclair combined their efforts that they produced their best works. One of them was undoubtedly “Prison: The Sexual Jungle,” published in the November/December 1979 issue, for which the pair won the George Polk Award. The lengthy account of the nature and extent of prison rape and homosexuality was unlike anything ever written in a prison periodical and probably better than anything in popular literature outside. It opens with a terrifying description of an inmate’s gang rape. The inmate begins to cry as the last attacker rises off his battered body, singed with cigarette burns that had made his body twitch to the delight of his rapists. “He still cried,” they wrote, “overwhelmed by the knowledge that it was not over, that this was only the beginning of a nightmare that would only end with violence, death or release from prison.”

“Rape and the possibility of becoming victim to sexual violence is part of every woman’s consciousness, but while many women live in fear of it, the odds of it happening to the average woman are nothing like the odds facing the typical man walking into the average jail or prison in the nation,” they wrote, “where rape and sexual violence is as much a part of their pained existence as are the walls holding them prisoner.”

Moreover, rape in prison means something entirely different than the same word in the outside world. “Few female victims in society must repay their

rapist for the violence he inflicted upon them by devoting their existence to servicing his every need for years after—but rape victims in the world of prison must,” they wrote.

Aside from describing the kind of sexual violence and homosexuality bred in prisons, the two inmate-journalists leveled the charge that many prison staffers tolerate sexual violence as a means of keeping the inmate population under control. Of the staffers they wrote “While they might initially be shocked and concerned about it on their first day of employment, one cannot realistically expect them to retain that same shock and revulsion after years of daily exposure to it. After a while they become influenced by it to some degree, some developing a certain tolerance to it, others perhaps even coming to accept it as being part of the natural order of things if not actually being Right.”

The twenty-seven-page exposé, which took months, even years to produce, is a timeless document on how the deviant sexual violence replete in prison adds another dimension to the punishment of an offender. It would be easy for the public to blame the whole affair on the prisoners, noted the *Angolite*, because they were, after all, murderers, robbers, and muggers. “But the prisoners didn’t create the situation. Their behavior merely reflects the response of desperate men, locked in a cruel and abnormal situation, exercising the only avenues left to them to cling to the very normal need to feel strong, masculine and worthwhile, to ‘normality’, trying desperately to not lose touch with the ‘real’ world by creating an artificial one patterned after the one they left behind,” wrote Rideau and Sinclair. “The violence, the murders, the suicides, and the human debris left in the wake of their effort is the cost.”²³

When the prison administration approved “The Sexual Jungle,” writer Elin Schoen described the amazement of the two editors. “They didn’t have any objections or anything?” asked Sinclair.

“Nup,” replied Rideau. “In fact, they thought it was very well done.” Sinclair smiled and concluded “Well, that confirms it. We can do anything.”²⁴

Still, it was not much of a surprise that the administration approved the article. Since the *Angolite*’s “rebirth” in 1976, editorial conferences with the administration consisted of debates over style rather than content. “They are concerned not over what we write but how we write it,” said Sinclair.²⁵

In the early years of the *Angolite*, the person with whom the pair argued over editorial matters the most had been at Angola even longer than they. Peggi Gresham, who as part of her duties as associate warden oversaw the *Angolite*, came to Angola in 1952 after marrying a prison officer. A dedicated administrator, Gresham survived in what is usually a man's world. She supported the decision Phelps made to give the magazine wide latitude because "the public has a right to know what goes on in the prison, and the inmates are the best people to tell them." Also, she said, the inmates had a right to such a forum.²⁶

Sometimes Gresham advised the two writers to tone down a story for their own protection, but she never censored one. Their editorial conferences were akin to that of a meeting between a publisher and an editor. The most regular argument was over the use of prison jargon. Phelps forbade the two inmates from using vulgar language in the *Angolite*. "I say we have a middle-class audience and there will be no four-letter words," he explained. But Rideau replied, "There's nothing so vulgar as the way we have to live here. We rape each other, we kill each other, and then they worry about words on paper."²⁷

But while administrators worried about readers outside of Angola, Rideau and Sinclair had concerns about readers inside the prison. For example, when the prisoners who sold their blood plasma to an outside firm struck for higher payments, the *Angolite* reported on how two prison leaders were manipulating the strike for their own gains. As prisons usually contain a healthy number of residents who have few scruples about using violence to register their displeasure, this kind of reporting was risky. "You're in a world where everybody plays for keeps," noted Rideau.²⁸

Officials were also not exempt from the *Angolite*'s brand of journalistic criticism. In the fall of 1980, for instance, a medical specialist complained to the warden and other state officials that the *Angolite* had lied about him and demanded a retraction in the next two issues along with a written apology. Because the two inmates had to document their stories before Gresham approved their publication, they replied to the doctor's charges with a terse answer. "Our position was and will be no retraction, no apology, no nothing. We stand by our story - all the way to the courthouse."

By the 1980s, the *Angolite* had revolutionized the world of prison journalism. No prison publication had ever possessed its freedom, and equally important, no prison journalists had ever made such productive use of editorial license. The *Angolite*, in the words of the old newspaper credo,

comforted the afflicted and afflicted the comfortable. In the spring of 1980, Phelps once again boarded his blue plane and flew up to Angola, this time to settle a dispute between the warden and the two journalists. In the middle of the heated conference, Phelps paused and a smile broke out on his face. “I was just wondering,” he told the arguing inmates and warden, “how I could ever describe this scene to any correctional administrator in the nation. They would never understand it, much less relate to it.”²⁹

Phelps himself admitted he had not been prepared for what happened when he granted the *Angolite* its editorial freedom. “It wasn’t courage,” he told a reporter “Hell, it was just ignorance.” Nonetheless, he was in the end pleased with the results. “Maybe some of my peers would like it to go away,” he said. “I’m sure that inmates elsewhere would like to publish the same type of magazine.”³⁰

Inmates elsewhere, however, were often barred from receiving the *Angolite*. That they were revealed that even in the 1980s prison authorities still were no closer to resolving the debate as to whether a free press can be tolerated within a prison as they were at the 1870 American Prison Congress. They could, however, no longer claim that the debate was a hypothetical one. Rideau and Sinclair had, in the span of a decade, realized the promise of a free prison press.

“We, as a class of people, leave much to be desired,” Rideau and Sinclair once admitted in an editorial. But inmates are not all the unrepentant creatures that the public perceives them to be. Many were capable of change, they wrote, but “angry winds of vengeance” makes it difficult to convince the public. “The *Angolite* is one of the few instruments left us through which to convey realities and to chip away at the monstrous image the public has conceived of us,” wrote the two lifers who remade themselves while coming to terms with the challenges of a typewriter. “In that context, the *Angolite* and its achievements must be regarded as a symbolic hoisting of the flag for those prisoners struggling to transcend their tragic mistakes, their personal problems and the pain of their life-situation in search of something better and decent in life.”³¹

Chapter 17

Fighting Back

“Hey, you know what those f###ers have done? they’ve censored the word censored.”

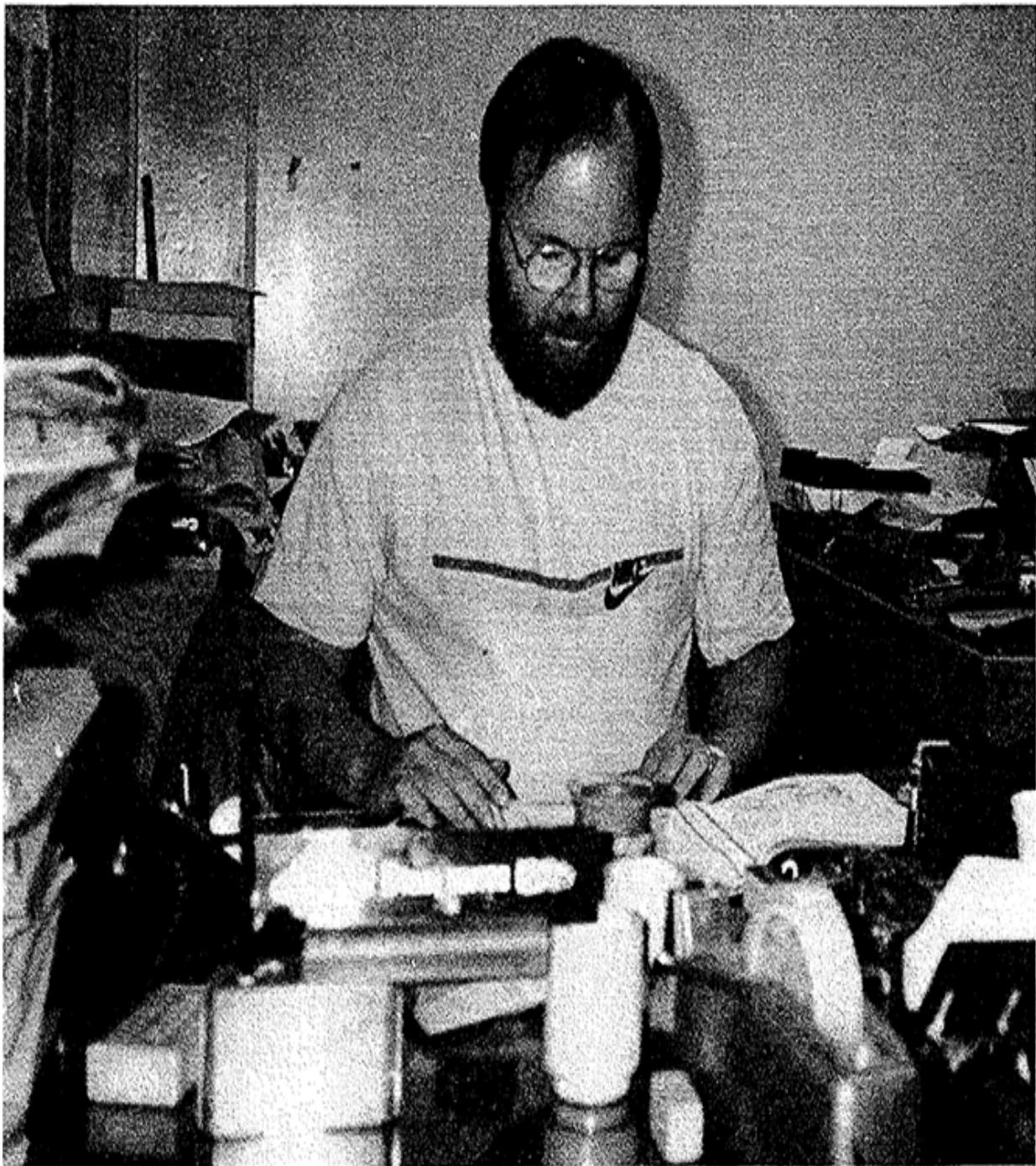
“Not the word; the *implication* of the word,” corrected Elliot. “They don’t want the people on the streets knowing that they suppress things; that there’s no freedom of the press in the penitentiary.”

—“Whamo,” a short story by Josh Hill. *Vacavalle Star*, June/July 1981

Had it been the *San Francisco Chronicle* or the *Fresno Bee*, the incident would have been carved into history books. But as it was only a prison newspaper they burned that day in the California Medical Facility at Vacaville, few people even noticed. The episode began when inmate Vic Diaz, editor of the correctional facility’s *Vacavalle Star*, submitted the proofs of the December 1980 issue to Warden Hal Watts, recently appointed to bring order to the facility following a series of killings and increased employee unrest. Watts told Diaz that four articles in the upcoming Christmas issue could not be printed. The articles - one critical of a behavior modification program, another describing an incident in which two guards allegedly harassed inmates, a letter to the editor asking inmates to join the Prisoners’ Union (a reform group), and an editorial about a banned employee organization - would have to go because they were either too negative or contained personal attacks on employees, said Watts.

This wasn’t the first time an official had told Diaz to pull material from an upcoming issue of his mimeographed monthly. The last time it had happened, in May of 1980, Diaz had printed CENSORED in bold letters across the front cover, along with pictures and quotes of Presidents Washington and Lincoln. “My battles against censorship come from, really, a patriotic kind of root,” explained Diaz. “I am a Vietnam veteran, and I view the Vietnam War pretty much the same way I view censorship. And that is a number of fat-cat

bureaucrats sitting in their oval offices making decisions to restrict my life.”¹ On the inside pages of the issue, the banned material had been replaced with notices such as “Staff has determined that this editorial is inappropriate for publication in the newspaper. It will not be printed for that reason.”



Vic Diaz, editor of the Vacaville Star in 1980, at work on an issue that would never be published because of new efforts by the state of California to muzzle the inmate press.

So Diaz, once again faced with interference with what he believed were his editorial prerogatives, reached for his banner headline CENSORED. This time, however, when word reached the warden of how Diaz was interpreting his

instructions in the issue coming off the press, Watts ordered his staff to round up every copy and carry them straight to the incinerator. A few copies were secreted away by inmates, but the bulk ended up as ashes.

“The funny thing about it,” noted Diaz, “is most of the staff around here support the newspaper.” In fact, said inmates, Warden Watts had difficulty at first finding officers willing to carry out his search-and-destroy order. “If I have accomplished anything ... is that I have gotten the staff to read the newspaper,” said Diaz with pride. “They take me seriously now, whereas I was just a nuisance to them before.”²

While Diaz was waiting for a chance to tell the story of the Christmas burning to a local judge, two guards arrived at the *Star* office. Diaz was at his desk, editing a story on his manual typewriter. He looked up at the officers, who had walked in unannounced, and asked them what they wanted. His office key, they replied. “Say what?” Diaz remembers replying. They told him to hand in his key, that the *Star* was being put out of business. They escorted Diaz back to his cell. The locks on the newspaper’s office door were changed, and the warden announced that publication of the paper had been “temporarily suspended.”

As dramatic as the incident sounds, it was, at the time, only the most recent confrontation between inmate-journalists and state officials in California. For over four years in the late 1970s, inmate-journalists had squabbled with prison authorities over what they considered excessive censorship. The stubborn refusal of California corrections officials to grant their inmate newspapers freedom like that given to the *Angolite* in Louisiana had brought the conflict into the courtroom.

The first case began in early 1976 at the Soledad prison when Artie Bailey, then editor of the *skck* tabloid the *Soledad Star News*, sought to publish two news stories. The articles, both written by reporter Willie Brandt, reported on talks recently given at the prison by Alice Lytle, then deputy legal affairs secretary to Governor Jerry Brown, and another by Berkeley professor Norm Amundson of the Center for Labor Research and Education. Both articles were approved by the print shop supervisor. But an associate superintendent, worried about an ongoing Prisoners’ Union organizing drive, blocked publication of the articles. They “catered to a special interest,” he claimed.

Incensed, Bailey appealed the decision through the various prescribed channels of review within the prison. While appealing the decision, he also

asked that a clear set of guidelines be established so that in the future he would know what was and was not permitted to be published in the *Soledad Star News*. Each level of review supported the associate superintendent's decision and ignored Bailey's request for guidelines.

Not satisfied, Bailey turned to the state's courts, appealing the administrator's decision under a California law protecting the First Amendment rights of prisoners. The law, approved that year, stated that an inmate could "be deprived of such rights, and only such rights, as is necessary in order to provide for the reasonable security of the institution in which he is confined and for the reasonable protection of the public."

The state argued in court that by virtue of its "ownership" of the prison paper, it should have all the rights of a publisher. Said Richard Tullis of the Attorney General's office, "We have always contended that if it's a private paper, like the *San Francisco Chronicle* or the *New York Times* or whatever, that the publisher decides what goes in.... If a reporter wants something else, then he can discuss it with them. But they get the final word."³

The California court was not impressed with the state's claim. In fact, the trial court ruled that not only had the prison administration erred in prohibiting the two articles from appearing, but the state's prisons needed direction from the courts on the issue. The corrections department was ordered to "enact guidelines limiting future censorship of articles and ... to enact administrative regulations providing for expeditious review." Under the proposed guidelines, censorship would be limited to matters that "would reasonably be deemed to be a threat to the security of the institution."

The corrections department appealed the ruling. By now three years had elapsed and prison officials were no longer concerned with the particular articles. Their real concern, as the court reviewed the case in the summer of 1979, was that the judges would strengthen the independence and freedom of the inmate newspapers that they considered a thorn in their side. Furthermore, if the court ruled against them, feared officials, they would lose face and thus lose what little control they exercised over the papers. "They are very interested in preserving their historical prerogatives," noted Brandt.

The state court of appeals did what the officials feared. The inmates did have a First Amendment interest in the paper, ruled the judges in a two-to-one decision. Even if the state could be said to be the owner or publisher of the *Soledad Star News*, said the judges, "this status would not confer upon it the right to suppress free expression in a manner inconsistent with the First

Amendment.” Again the corrections department appealed, this time to the state’s supreme court.

Preparing for the next court battle, within months of the appeals court decision, corrections officials changed the manner in which the inmate newspapers were funded. In the past, as with most states, the cost of publishing an inmate periodical was funded by something called the Inmate Welfare Fund, or IWF. These funds are raised by the inmates in various ways and spent, usually at the discretion of the warden, for projects related to inmate activities. In Louisiana, for instance, the money is raised through the sale of inmate blood plasma and from the proceeds of the annual prison rodeo. In California, whose IWF was established in 1945, the money came from such varied sources as interest on convict trust accounts and profits from prison canteens and handicraft sales. State officials changed the source of the newspapers’ funding from IWF to general funds to bolster their argument that the papers were not inmate publications *per se*, rather part of the prison’s vocational opportunities.

Inmate-journalists, however, were claiming victory in court. Most believed the state’s high court would hand down a favorable ruling. Prison officials, on the other hand, continued to act as though their prerogatives had never been questioned. Within days of the appeals court ruling, for example, the *San Quentin News* was shut down. Publication of the inmate newspaper was suspended because, according to the prison official in charge of overseeing its operation, it published too many negative articles. The news reported in the paper, he said, was “slanted and the overall content was not in keeping with the institutional policy.”

Bus Trip Cancelled

A letter was received from Chevonne Austin, Reservation Coordinator, of the Help Public Service Foundation stating that due to money problems the scheduled bus trip to San Quentin from Los Angeles on March 8 was cancelled.

For those people interested, the next scheduled bus trip is for April 26.

The Help Public Service Foundation is located at 8215 South Broadway, Los Angeles, CA 90003. Their phone number is (213) 753-1265.



Post-New Mexico Hysteria?

By Donnie Johnson

Hire an Ex-con

The Point of No Return Law:

The light at the end of the tunnel could turn out to be the headlight of an oncoming train.

San Quentin Religious Service

Christian Science

Sunday 9:00 A.M.

Catholic Mass

Sunday 9:00 A.M.

Protestant

Sunday 9:00 A.M.

Church of Christ

Sunday 11:00 A.M.

Jewish Services

Tuesday 9:30 A.M.

CENSORED

In the late 1970s and early 1980s, conflicts between inmate journalists and prison authorities in California resulted in unusual page designs such as what occurred on the corner of this page published in the *San Quentin News*, March 21, 1980.

After four months, while a lawsuit was pending in court, warden George Sumner agreed to allow the paper to resume publication if the inmates did “not print anything that would cause trouble in the institution, nothing that was obscene, and material of good caliber.” The inmates dropped their suit. But the paper’s presses had hardly started rolling when the warden again tried to muzzle it, this time by firing the entire staff.

What precipitated this second attack on the *San Quentin News* was an example of enterprising reporting. The *News* had a long tradition of reporting excellence dating back to the 1930s. In fact, Herman K. Spector, one of the nation’s leading supporters of prison newspapers, worked for many years as the prison librarian. So when numerous complaints about the unsanitary conditions in the mess hall and kitchen had failed to lead to any improvements, two reporters for the *News* decided to look into matters themselves. Reporter Robert Scott, along with photographer Vince Smith, took a tour of the kitchen and mess hall and interviewed officials of the food staff. Their report on the incredible conditions, complete with photographs of bird droppings in the mess hall, was the lead story of the February 15, 1980, issue. After reading the story, Warden Sumner summoned the *News*’s editor and reporter Scott to his office. He informed them that they, along with the photographer and the paper’s other reporter, were fired.

“That food story was the last straw,” Mike Madding, the prison’s public information officer, explained to the *San Francisco Chronicle*. “The warden feels that it didn’t give both sides of the story - and that it violated his agreement with the *San Quentin News* staff.” When the *Chronicle* asked permission to take its own photographs of the mess hall, they were turned down. “We’ve got a provocative situation here, and we’re not going to fuel it,” said Madding. He also admitted that birds had come into the mess hall through some broken windows.

After the firing the warden announced that in the future the *San Quentin News* would be published by the Men’s Advisory Council, an elected inmate body that was often controlled by the prison administration. The council, however, surprised the warden by unanimously rejecting his plan, and the four *News* staffers went to court. Judge Joseph Wilson, upon hearing the inmates’ complaint, ordered Warden Sumner to show cause why the court should not grant the inmates’ motion that they be reinstated and publication of the *News* resumed. Upon reading the article that had resulted in the firing of the staff, Wilson said, “This is an ordinary news story. I don’t see

anything horrendous about it.... I can't imagine how the warden could say this is unfair.”⁴

Seeing he had little legal justification for his action, a week before his court date Sumner tried to compromise with the News staffers, hoping that as before the inmates would withdraw their suit. Summoning the four to his office again, he told them the paper could begin publishing again with the same staff except for Scott. Scott, he said, had a “personal ax to grind” and would not be allowed back on the paper. Judge Wilson went along with the warden’s change of mind, upholding his right to keep Scott off the staff. But in June, at a new hearing, Wilson decided that Sumner’s firing of Scott “was based solely on his being the author of an article of which the warden disapproved.” Wilson ordered that the prison reinstate Scott. The warden appealed, but the issue became mute as Scott was transferred to another prison for reasons unrelated to his role in the controversy.

The inmates had won another round in court. This time, surprisingly, their most vocal critic was a “free world” newspaper. “We dissent from that ruling,” said the *San Francisco Examiner* in an editorial on Wilson’s decision to reinstate Scott, “in the belief that First Amendment rights - specifically, in this case, the right to a free press-do not reach to prison publications, written by prisoners, distributed behind prison walls.” Misrepresenting the case to its readers, the *Examiner* said that Scott had been fired for writing an article critical of prison food. “The matter of prison cuisine aside, it is up to Sumner, not Judge Wilson, to decide if the content of the prison paper is potentially incendiary and a threat to prison security,” said the paper’s editorial writer.

While the *San Quentin News* was celebrating its victory (“We’re Back-Again” read the headline), trouble was again brewing at Soledad for editor Terry Huston, one of Bailey’s successors. During a previous term in prison, Huston had worked as a prison editor but was not prepared for the sudden confrontation his choice of a photograph and a drawing would bring. The photograph was of a nude woman bending over asking inmates to get behind the upcoming motorcycle show, and the cartoon depicted a couple making love on a guillotine with the caption “We at the *Soledad Star News* do not want to see conjugal visits cut off.”

Superintendent Reginald Pulley, reviewing the June issue, opposed publication of the two items. Then either he ordered or his staff thought he

ordered the destruction of the entire run of the issue. All 5,500 copies were shredded.

Five months later Huston convinced Judge Richard Silver, who had tried the original Bailey case, to order the two items published over the warden's objections. Huston, however, was only able to savor his victory for a few months. In February of 1981, before he could celebrate his first anniversary as editor of the *Soledad Star News*, a raid on the print shop by guards turned up counterfeit marriage and birth certificates. Huston and the entire staff were dismissed. In Huston's desk they found only personalized stationery that officials claimed had been printed on state prison presses, but he was still fired along with the others. Inmates who asked not to be identified said at the time that the discovery of stationery in Huston's desk was one of many excuses the administration could have used to dismiss him. But, they noted, by this means officials succeeded in replacing Huston without another court battle.

A younger and less experienced inmate, Dennis Lacy, was put in charge of the *Soledad Star News*, which in two years had gone through at least four editorial staff changes. Under Lacy, the dramatic headlines and lengthy articles often critical of the administration became things of the past. But even producing a lackluster successor to the old *Star News*, Lacy still bumped heads with the administration over content. "It's hard," he admitted, "but it can be done. If they tell me I can't print something I just modify it."

So in the spring of 1981, following the Christmas burning, when Diaz arrived for his appointment in the Solano County Superior Court, he was only the most recent case of an inmate-journalist seeking protection from the suppressive urges of state corrections officials. With the help of a prestigious San Francisco law firm, in April Diaz convinced Judge William Jensen to restrain prison officials from preventing publication of the *Vacavalle Star*. While awaiting a decision from the supreme court on the Soledad case, Jensen said, "We're trying to maintain the status quo right now."

Diaz, a New Yorker serving time for first-degree murder, had been editing the *Vacavalle Star* since June of 1979. By the time of his first round of court appearances, he had served as an editor of an inmate newspaper longer than any other current inmate-editor in California's twenty-two-thousand inmate system. In part because of his court appearance and his high visibility, over the years he had succeeded to avoid what he called "the midnight express." "It was one of the old techniques the administration

uses," he explained. "They come and get you after the rest of the institution is locked down, put you in a car and ship you off to another joint."

Working out of a small one-room office, Diaz and his staff of three turned a twenty-six-year-old literary magazine into a tough news monthly. In doing so he immediately came into conflict with the same officials who had approved his application for the job as editor. "Once I make the decision that it is appropriate for printing in the *Vacavalle Star* I stand by the decision all the way," he said. "I will go to Mary's house and back on the issue."⁵

Diaz wasn't looking for a fight. The last time he had one, he strangled and knifed to death a young woman living in his Burbank apartment complex. Because of that, the soft-spoken ex-Marine was confined to the large two-thousand-bed California facility designed to provide psychiatric care to convicted criminals, the same institution where cult murderer Charles Manson was confined.

When first confronted by the censorship of prison officials, Diaz did something almost every writer who has lived with a censor does. "I found myself writing for the censor," he said. "You know-what will he accept, what will he not accept? Finally, I came to a point where I said 'You know what? I'm tired of that. What the hell am I doing?' At that point I stopped writing for anyone but myself."⁶ His success in making the *Vacavalle Star* an exceptional inmate newspaper was the result of his meticulous effort to teach himself reporting and editing skills. "My record speaks for itself," he said. "Everything I have written the administration has never been able to disprove."

"This may sound cold, but I am in for murder-not for lying," he said, reshuffling another stack of papers on his desk. "Just because I am a convicted criminal, it should not be taken that I cannot be believed, not be credible."⁷

In publishing his style of no-holds-barred journalism, Diaz ran other risks besides angering prison officials. Early on he received some not-so-friendly criticism from a number of inmates. As he told it, he was faced with the choice of giving in and striving for "the good-guy image on the line" or continuing to report things as he saw them. Ultimately, he decided that if his critics wanted to take matters into their own hands "there isn't a damned thing I can do to stop them, except try to put some protection on my tail."⁸

He accomplished that by corresponding with members of Congress, judges, lawyers, and journalists. His critics, he felt, would be more reluctant

to do anything if he kept a high profile. At the very least, the attention he gained outside made prison officials a little less capricious when dealing with the *Vacavalley Star*. But though they were no longer as impulsive, officials devised other, more sophisticated ways of restraining the *Star*. In late November of 1981, the *Star*'s staff decided to stop publishing after the administration pulled eight articles from the Thanksgiving edition before it went to the printing press. In a memorandum, Diaz wrote, "we cannot put this edition out nor work on future editions until the courts clarify our position."⁹ Closing down shop himself to attract attention, Diaz told reporters that aside from withdrawing numerous articles at the last minute, the administration had also eliminated names of people who were not "supporters" of the prison system from the mailing list, taken inordinate amounts of time to review articles submitted for approval, and harassed inmates on the *Star*'s staff. Judge Jensen again entered the fray and ordered the articles published and demanded that officials speed up their review of forthcoming issues.

Meanwhile prison officials in Sacramento, watching their lawyers lose case after case, made threats to shut down all the papers if the state's high court upheld the lower court's rulings. If the papers were to continue existing, said Philip Guthrie, spokesperson for the department of corrections, they must be subject to the full discretion and control of the administration. "If the courts decide something other than that, we won't have them any more," he said.¹⁰

Various prison officials continued to act as though the courts had already agreed to Guthrie's demand. At San Quentin, for instance, the May 7, 1982, issue was confiscated because it contained an empty space with the word censored emblazoned across it where an editorial on the death penalty had been scheduled. The warden who ordered the confiscation of the *San Quentin News* was none other than Reginald Pulley, who had recently been transferred from Soledad.

While inmates at San Quentin waited for their turn to tell Judge Wilson of the latest violation of his court order, the department of corrections decided that it would no longer wait for the supreme court's decision. In August 1982, it announced that all the state's prison newspapers would be closed so that the \$58,000 a year they cost could be spent on paid jobs for inmates. Unlike other times when the department had harassed inmate newspapers, this time there was a public outcry, fueled in part by the media. The outcry

was noticed in Sacramento where State Assemblyman Art Agnos introduced legislation that would tie up the salaries of top department officials until the suspension was lifted. Other legislation was introduced to guarantee to inmates the right to publish newspapers. The department, under pressure, rescinded the order within a week. But officials quietly vowed to continue to disregard the courts' continual support of the rights of inmate-journalists.

California state officials were certainly jealous of their colleagues in the federal prisons in California. In 1982, all three federal prison newspapers in the state were closed. "Rather than continue litigating and letting the courts decide what we could print, we took action," said John Shaw, an attorney with the Bureau of Prisons. "With no newspapers, censorship isn't addressed."¹¹

Unfortunately for the California state prison authorities, their right to control state prison newspapers was enshrined in a state provision and would be arbitrated by the state's highest court. In December, the court rejected the prison administration's claim that inmate newspapers are house organs over which wardens have absolute control. The judges further instructed the officials to obey their own regulations that established newspapers as a forum of expression for prisoners' ideas and views. The *Soledad Star News* and other state prison papers were entitled to First Amendment protection "except to the extent that such rights must be curtailed for institutional security and public safety," said the judges.¹²

However, what the prison administrators could not accomplish by outright banning they managed to do by other means over the succeeding three years. By 1985, only two of the seven papers in California prisons remained in business and one of them hardly published any issues. Officials told an inquiring UPI reporter that the papers closed because of prisoner apathy, budget cuts, equipment breakdowns, or staff transfers. Vic Diaz's *Vacavalley Star* was really the only paper to have endured the state's assault. It still operated because Diaz, although transferred to another prison, had succeeded in persuading Judge William Jensen to keep the paper under his jurisdiction.

Diaz said that prison officials feared communication among prisoners because it threatened their control. The officials who censored his words "are not going to allow me to tell them how dirty their backyard is," he said. But it was more than a little dirt in a newspaper that scared the California corrections department. In his editorial introducing himself to his readers in

1979, Diaz wrote, “I know there tends to be a world of difference between the way things are, and the way things can be. I see it as part of my job to define those differences.” To Guthrie, Pulley, Sumner, Watts, and others in charge of California’s prisons in the 1980s, such sentiments were best kept behind bars.

Chapter 18

The First Amendment and the Prison Press

It is not only inmates who are deprived of freedom of expression when prison administrators engage in censorship, for prisons are no longer peripheral public institutions that can be separated and isolated from the society they serve. Whenever government agencies decide who can speak and who can listen, the rights of all of us are threatened.

— Luke Janusz, editor, *Odyssey*

In the United States journalists enjoy a constitutionally protected right to publish their work. The right, of course, is enshrined in the First Amendment of the Bill of Rights, whose guardian angel has been the U.S. Supreme Court. The Supreme Court has taken an especially active role since 1931, when the justices made their first direct ruling on press censorship and struck down a state law violating the freedom of press in *Near v. Minnesota*. Reviewing their work this century, author James E. Leahy wrote “the justices should be given high marks for their interpretations of the freedom of the press provision of the First Amendment.”¹

For the prison press, the opposite has been the case. The Supreme Court has refused to extend the constitutional protection of the First Amendment to prison journalists. “Two centuries of high-minded judicial language about the primacy of the First Amendment is conspicuous for its absence in prison opinions,” noted Ronald Kuby and William Kunstler, attorneys with the Center for Constitutional Rights in 1993. The standoffish attitude of the High Court has left prison journalists without serious legal protection. When they have won judgments, such as in California’s courts in the late 1970s and early 1980s (see [Chapter 17](#)), the circumstances were unique and had virtually no legal application outside the state.

The source of the Supreme Court’s hesitancy is history. Aside from matters relating to national security, no other government activity has been

so immune from court review as that of the imprisonment of criminals. It has been almost as if the courts, upon pronouncing sentence, collectively washed their hands of the affairs of the offender brought before them. The world to which judges deliver these men and women has held little interest for the judiciary. Once the offender is handed over to the prison keeper, the court has considered its job done.

Consider Sol Wachtler's experience, for example. Chief Judge of the U.S. Court of Appeals in New York, Wachtler went to prison in 1993 for thirteen months after pleading guilty to a harassment charge. While at the medium-security federal prison in Butner, North Carolina, he kept a diary. In it, he recalled having taken tours of prisons while a judge. "I always knew that I was seeing only what I was supposed to see, but I felt my visit was a demonstration to the inmates that we cared about their conditions," Wachtler wrote. "Now that I am a prisoner and judges are being shown the facility that imprisons me, I realize how deluded I was in those years by my own vanity and by those escorts who so carefully planned my itinerary."² The ignorance of prisons to which Wachtler confesses is, sadly, true for many other members of the judiciary. Thus, unlike cases concerning business, real estate, criminal, and constitutional law, with which judges usually have a personal understanding, matters of inmate rights are exceedingly alien to their sphere of life.

In its consideration of prisoners' rights in general, however, for awhile it did look as though the Supreme Court might side with inmates. Certainly the trend of its decisions was moving in their direction. In the past, the Court had regarded inmates as possessing no rights at all. In *Ruffin v. The Commonwealth*, in 1871, the High Court summed up its attitude as follows:

[The Prisoner] has, as a consequence of his crime, not only forfeited his liberty, but all his personal rights except those which the law in its humanity accords to him. He is for the time being the slave of the State.³

The extremism of this doctrine was slowly displaced in this century. But although prisoners could no longer be regarded as slaves of the state, the Supreme Court adopted a hands-off doctrine on most matters regarding inmate rights. The justices, according to court observers, believed they had neither the power nor the duty to define a prisoner's constitutional rights.⁴

The judiciary's reluctance to interfere with the running of prisons stemmed first from a belief that the law made convicted persons outlaws, stripping them of their legal rights and privileges as part of their punishment.

Prison journalist Tom Runyon recalled feeling the loss of his rights when he was incarcerated in prison. “Over and over again that fact was dinned into us,” Runyon wrote. “Every single thing that made life bearable was a privilege. It was a privilege, not a right, to eat a meal or sleep or look at the sun or receive a letter, and that galling knowledge was with me every waking moment.”⁵

Second, the development of a professional cadre of prison administrators fostered the notion that running a prison was the province of experts. Retaining control of an offender behind walls was the keeper’s responsibility, and the courts wanted to stay clear of any behavior that, in their eyes undermined the authority of prison officials and thus hindered their ability to fulfill this custodial task. As prisons grew, this anxiety of the judiciary’s was amplified. The very structural design of the modern prison system encouraged the courts to adopt an attitude of nonintervention because the judiciary feared it lacked the knowledge to dictate policy to prison administrators who supposedly possessed the expertise required to maintain control of large numbers of prisoners.

Events in the 1950s, 1960s, and 1970s caused the Court to shed its handoff approach. Prisoners grew more assertive and militant on matters of civil rights. Lawyers, in turn, became more interested in such cases, and the Earl Warren Court (1953-69) was more sympathetic to disenfranchised members of society. “The movement to discard ‘hands-off doctrine’ reached its pinnacle,” said constitutional scholar Sheldon Krantz, “when the Supreme Court, in a series of opinions, acknowledged that prisoners have constitutional rights for whose protection the courts have responsibility.”⁶ Most important, however, was the crumbling of the facade of expertise behind which prison authorities hid from court oversight when prison after prison erupted into riot. It had been, after all, the governing theory that administrators knew best how to control their populations.⁷

With the disappearance of the hands-off doctrine, inmates turned increasingly to the courts to try to alter prison conditions. In 1938, for example, less than one out of every fifty suits filed in federal court was filed by an inmate. By 1968, one out of every six came from a prisoner. “It used to be that the favorite recreational activity of prisoners was playing baseball. Now it’s filing lawsuits,” noted California’s attorney general in the early 1970s.⁸ But the hands-off doctrine was not completely abandoned, especially

when inmates have brought complaints regarding First Amendment infringements.

Until 1974, the Supreme Court did not directly address the question of what constituted, in the words of Justice Lewis F. Powell, an “appropriate standard of review for prison regulations restricting freedom of speech.” The High Court found its opportunity in *Procunier v. Martinez*, a case challenging the scope of administrative censorship of inmate mail in California.⁹ The Court rejected “any attempt to justify censorship of inmate correspondence merely by reference to certain assumptions about the legal status of prisoners.” The justices decided mail could be censored only if it furthered an important or substantial government interest unrelated to the suppression of expression. The limitations of First Amendment freedoms, they added, must be no greater than is necessary or essential to the protection of the particular governmental interest involved. These two requirements would provide that “appropriate standard of review.”¹⁰

The new standard was put to use within months by John Shuttle, a Vermont prison journalist. Shuttle, who was the editor of the monthly *Luparar*, published at the Vermont State Prison, filed suit in the U.S. District Court of Vermont to prevent the state from restricting his newspaper’s distribution. The *Luparar* had been established in December of 1971 by a group of inmates. Guidelines governing the content of the newspaper were established at a meeting of the inmates and the prison’s administrative staff. Only prison issues, not personalities, would be discussed in articles, according to the guidelines. Further, the publication would be funded by the state and printed on the prison’s offset printing press. In the fall of 1972, less than a year after the *Luparar* began publication, Shuttle became editor. The administration claimed that Shuttle radically altered the *Luparar* and violated the cardinal rule of the guidelines by publishing personal attacks.

In January 1973, the administration told Shuttle that the paper would not be distributed because some of the articles were objectionable. The newspaper’s staff made two attempts to mail the issue to outside readers but were rebuffed by the prison mail carrier. Copies were quickly distributed within the prison, and the administration recovered only a few of the five-hundred-copy press run. After the incident, authorities shut down the paper and Shuttle, along with Craig Murray, an outside subscriber, sued.

The case brought two central issues of prison journalism before the district court. First, which, if any, First Amendment protection applied to an

inmate newspaper? Second, may a state that supports a prison newspaper, having permitted it to be published in the first place, shut it down because it objects to its content?

“We feel,” wrote Judge Coffrin in his decision, “that the principles applicable to censorship of prison mail apply equally to censorship of a prison newspaper.” Any suppression of the newspaper for reasons other than those prescribed in the Martinez case would “violate the outside subscribers First Amendment rights to receive the newspaper.” Furthermore, said Judge Coffrin, that “distribution of a prison newspaper within the prison is entitled to the same protection and subject to the same limitations as distribution outside of the prison.”¹¹

As to the state’s right to suppress a prison newspaper, Judge Coffrin said that although the state is not required to establish or support such a publication, once it has done so, objections to editorial content that does not threaten the security of the prison are not a good enough reason to stop distribution. “The fact that an article is critical, attacks personalities or is even defamatory is not a sufficient reason standing alone to suppress the publication in which it appears,” ruled the judge. He said that if the state was worried about libel, they should put a disclaimer in the paper.¹²

The *Luparar* victory stemmed directly from the lower courts’ interpretation of *Martinez*. In a case, for instance, heard by a U.S. district judge in western Pennsylvania in 1972 prior to *Martinez*, the right to suppress a publication had been upheld. Inmate Norman Gray and an interracial staff of convicts had begun publishing a newsletter to reduce racial tensions at the State Correctional Institute at Pittsburgh in December 1970. Called *Vibrations*, the weekly had been started with the encouragement of the warden. It contained news, letters to the editor, essays, astrology forecasts, poems, bits of humor, and the usual materials found in prison publications. The warden was replaced shortly after *Vibrations* began, and the new one did not like what he was reading. He was especially angered when he read an account of the stabbing to death of an inmate who had requested protection from the guards but was refused. On April 19, 1971, Gray and his fellow journalists found their office padlocked shut and many of their files confiscated and presumably destroyed.

Gray and other staffers sued, and their case was brought before Judge Gourley, the U.S. district judge for western Pennsylvania. He ruled in favor

of the administration, rendering a striking endorsement of the *re-Martinez* deferment to authority.

The right to curtail or foreclose publication of the newsletter seems to be a matter within the sound discretion of prison administrators. Especially is this so when one considers the vast amount of paper which accumulates before, during, and after publication of such a periodical. The threat of fire is itself a sufficient ground for terminating the newsletter.¹³

Seemingly *Martinez* had given inmates a strong footing for a claim to press freedom. *Martinez*, however, turned out to have been a high-water mark for the First Amendment in prison, according to Chana Barron, a professor at American University with expertise in corrections and the constitution. “Since 1974,” Barron said, “the Supreme Court has steadily narrowed the First Amendment rights of inmates.”¹⁴ In fact, the retreat began almost immediately following *Martinez*. In *Pell v. Procunier*, another case out of California, the Supreme Court held that inmates retained only those First Amendment rights that were “not inconsistent with his status as a prisoner or with the legitimate penal objectives of the correctional system.”¹⁵ The “substantial” and “important” penal objectives of *Martinez* had been reduced to “legitimate.”

For prison journalists, the germ of the Court’s coming retreat was contained in a footnote to *Martinez* in which the Court warned “different considerations may come into play in the case of mass mailings.” Judge Coffrin, in *Luparar*, had noted the warning but still applied the holdings of *Martinez*. In 1977, the Court explained what those considerations were. The occasion was a case that had worked its way up from North Carolina courts. In 1975 prison officials had refused to deliver packets of Prisoners’ Labor Union publications that had been mailed in bulk to inmates in several North Carolina prisons for distribution among prisoners. A district court found that “there is not one scintilla of evidence to suggest that the Union has been utilized to disrupt the operation of the penal institutions” and thus enjoined the prison officials from preventing the inmates from receiving the union’s publications.¹⁶

The Supreme Court, however, in *Jones v. North Carolina Prisoners’ Labor Union*, decided that the inmates’ right to mass mailing privileges was an issue better left to the discretion of prison officials. “The District Court, we believe, got off on the wrong foot in this case by not giving appropriate

recognition to the peculiar and restrictive circumstances of penal confinement.”¹⁷

“The necessary and correct result,” wrote Justice Rehnquist, “of our deference to the informed discretion of prison administrators permits them, and not the courts, to make the difficult judgments concerning institutional operations in situations such as this.”¹⁸

This recognition, wrote Chief Justice Burger, does not imply that a prisoner is stripped of all his constitutional rights. “Rather it reflects no more than a healthy sense of realism on our part to understand that needed reforms in the area of prison administration must come not from the federal courts, but from those with the most expertise in the field - prison administrators themselves,” he wrote. Only two justices dissented. One of them, Justice Thurgood Marshall, hoped that the majority opinion would “prove to be a temporary retreat.” His lament, however, turned out to be a lonely cry in the federal courts. The ruling ended the use of *Martinez* as a tool of inmate-journalists seeking refuge from capricious censorship and harassment and marked a return to the days of the hands-off doctrine.

In 1979, for example, the Fourth Circuit Court of Appeals sided with the state of Virginia in an attempt to restrict the distribution of an issue of a prison newspaper. *FYSK* (Facts You Should Know) was the inmate publication of the Virginia State penitentiary at Richmond. It was distributed free to inmates and for \$5 a year to outsiders. Before one of its issues went to press in 1977, the prison superintendent suggested a number of changes with which the editor disagreed. Stephen W. Bricker, a Richmond American Civil Liberties Union lawyer who represented the inmates in the case, said the administration had objected primarily to a number of articles. One concerned the accidental death of a sick inmate, a death that the article attributed to inattention by guards (headline: “Inmate Begs for Help, Dies in Bed”). The other alluded to the “forced resignation” of one of the prison’s previous wardens. The articles, Bricker says, “tended to put the administration in a bad light.”¹⁹ The superintendent threatened to prevent the publication of the issue unless the changes were made. The inmate-editor refused and filed suit.

In U.S. district court, the inmates argued that *Martinez* required that First Amendment rights prevail unless it could be proved that censorship furthered one or more substantive governmental goals. The prison administrators argued that the more recent ruling in *Jones* allowed for the

suppression of a paper if officials sincerely believed the disputed issue would cause security problems.



FYSK (Facts You Should Know), published by the prisoners of the Virginia State Penitentiary in Richmond, ran headlong into the court system's reluctance to support inmate claims to a free press.

Both the district and the appellate courts agreed with the officials. *Jones*, the appellate court ruled, required only that prison officials' concerns be reasonable. "Indeed," the appellate judges wrote, "it appears that those opposing the restriction must show that the prison officials must be conclusively shown to be wrong before the court should intervene in the prison administration." They said they did not believe the disputed issue of *FYSK* would "cause unrest or lower prisoner morale, or reduce the prison authorities' ability to rehabilitate." But they endorsed the right of prison officials to censor the *FYSK* stories because the officials sincerely believed the stories "could have exactly those effects." The court rejected inmate claims that suppression of the issue would abridge the rights of their outside subscribers. "We do not think that the fact there is some distribution of *FYSK* to paid subscribers outside the prison can limit the right of prison officials to censor the contents of the issues of *FYSK* which circulate within the prison," the appellate judges wrote.²⁰

The lesser standard of *Jones* prevailed in *FYSK* and subsequent cases. Thus it was not *Martinez*, but rather the succeeding Court decisions that

“established the framework for free speech rights of the millions of Americans to pass through the American penal system in the 1980s and early 1990s - the decade that would see the greatest growth in prison population in history,” according to Kuby and Kunstler. In sum, the courts withdrew the augmentation of prison press freedom contained in *Martinez*. Since then, the judiciary has restricted that right and, equally important, shifted the burden of proof in cases of prison censorship to inmates. In the first years after *Martinez*, if taken to court, prison officials had to prove that censorship of inmate newspapers was necessary for the security of the institution. Now it’s up to the inmates to prove that it was not necessary. Edward Koren, an attorney with the ACLU’s National Prison Project who argued many First Amendment cases on behalf of inmates in the 1970s and 1980s, said the new doctrine made his task almost impossible. He said, “As long as the corrections officer [censors] sincerely, honestly and as long as there is a relationship with penological goals, that is the line” the courts will accept.²¹

In the end, the 1974 *Martinez* ruling, which was handed down when this century’s most liberal Supreme Court was at its zenith, did not mark the beginning of the constitutional protection sought by prison journalists. In fact, as later rulings revealed, it was an empty gesture on the part of the justices. “For almost two decades,” wrote Kuby and Kunstler, “the Supreme Court and the lower courts have created an *apartheid* application of the First Amendment.”²²

Chapter 19

Prison Journalism Writes “-30-”

[C. Paul] Phelps's legacy would be a corrections system that respects and encourages freedom of expression, [and] honest and meaningful communications between inmates and administrators.... Phelps's corrections philosophy, which he always described as “just plain common sense,” has had little, if any, application outside Louisiana.

— Wilbert Rideau and Ron Wikberg, editors of *the Angolite*

The *Jefftown Journal* is gone. So are the *Summary*, *Our Paper*, the *Pendleton Reflector*, the *Mentor*, the *Lake Shore Outlook*, the *Atlantian*, the *New Era*, the *McNeil Island Lantern*, the *Sing Sing Bulletin*, the *Shadows*, and the *Presidio*. The list of closed publications goes on and on. In fact, of the top ten prison publications in 1963, only one still published in 1997. Indeed the future also looked dim for younger publications, such as *La Roca*, one of the stars of the 1980s, which was published at the Arizona State Prison at Florence. Even the annual Penal Press Competition, run every year since 1965 by Southern Illinois University, ceased in 1990. In the late 1990s, prison journalism is no longer a central institution of prison culture. It has become, for all intents and purposes, an artifact of penal history.

There were, of course, prison publications that continued to publish in the 1990s, and even a few new ones were launched. The venerable *Prison Mirror* began its 110th year of continuous publication in 1997, the seniormost prison publication by probably a half-century. On the whole, however, the *Mirror* has mellowed into a purveyor of the expected, the favorable, and the routine. The *Menard Time*, another paper with a long history, retreated to an unpredictable publishing schedule in 1995 and 1996 because of frequent lockdowns at the prison. In fact, rather than creating a new and larger readership for the penal press, the burgeoning prison population of the 1980s and 1990s proved greatly responsible for its demise.

The overcrowding and the mounting violence have put many of the nation's prisons into virtually a perpetual lockdown, preventing any inmate-journalists from doing their work. And even if security did not prevent inmates from publishing a paper, the overcrowding has caused budgetary problems that usually made it a futile hope.

LA ROCA

VOL. 6 - NO. 9 FEBRUARY/MARCH 1980



Public Defenders...there is another kind of defense.

***La Roca*, published by the inmates of the Arizona State Prison, usually featured trenchant cover images such as this one from the February/March 1980 issue.**

Those publications that endured into the 1990s represented the exception to the trend. As if to indicate the general decline in prison journalism, when the media reported on the remaining prison publications they were forced invariably to compare them with the *Angolite*, because no other benchmark of high-quality prison journalism remained.

PHelps CORRECTIONAL
FEBURARY THE CENTER
TNESTDER March
1996

Nothing CAN STOP A DREAM...

DR. MARTIN L.
KING



ILLUSTRATION
SCOTT STOVER
96

"FREDERICK DOUGLASS"



ONCE IT TAKES FLIGHT

While few of the diminishing number of prison publications feature any longer hard-hitting or animated journalism, the publications are still venues for vibrant inmate art. This illustration appeared on the cover of the Phelps Correctional Center *Insider* of February 1996.

Indeed, the *Angolite* had blossomed since its auspicious beginning in 1976. With nearly four thousand subscribers, its health was evident in every issue. For instance, the inside back cover of its January/February 1996 issue displayed a subscription advertisement like ones found in *Harper's* or *Atlantic*, with praise from the *New York Times*, *Baltimore Sun*, *Dallas Morning News*, ABC News anchor Peter Jennings, and novelists Elmore Leonard and James Lee Burke. The issue lived up to its billing. Its seventy pages featured a lengthy and insightful article on the end of the Death Penalty Resource Centers, which helped represent death-row inmates and was killed by the Republican Congress; a historical piece by a college professor on the imprisonment of women at Baton Rouge in the nineteenth century; a long review of a new book written by an inmate of the federal prison in Ashland, Kentucky; eight pages of legal news; obituaries; sports news; club news; a section devoted to miscellaneous writings submitted by readers; and several pages of poetry.

The masthead also revealed how much the magazine had changed over its first two decades. Rideau's name was all that remained of the original partnership that created the modern *Angolite*. Billy Sinclair, his associate editor, had left. In 1986, Sinclair, who had been at Angola since 1965, was approached by a prison employee trying to sell him a pardon. Instead of accepting the offer, Sinclair informed the FBI. Eventually, with Sinclair's cooperation, the payoff scheme was exposed and the head of the pardon board was sent to prison. Because of his undercover work, Sinclair was transferred out of Angola for his safety. In the years since he has received a clemency recommendation from the pardon board, but succeeding governors have rejected it. Sadly, his relationship with his former mentor disintegrated.

In 1990, Sinclair sued Rideau, accusing him of plagiarism for not having properly acknowledged his contributions to a university press collection that included works from the *Angolite* and of trying to damage Sinclair's journalistic reputation. The legal action, however, reflected more the bitterness stemming from Sinclair's role with the FBI than the professional issues raised by the suit. "Neither I, nor anyone else, has tried to damage Billy's journalistic reputation," Rideau told the *Los Angeles Times*. "He did

that to himself back in 1986, when he became an undercover agent for the FBI while he was working as a journalist.”¹

The informant role played by Sinclair hurt the *Angolite*, and Rideau searched for a new partner to assist in restoring the publication’s reputation. He turned to Ron Wikberg, a white convicted murderer who had been at Angola since 1969. Ironically, Wickberg had been a writer for the all-white *Angolite* when Rideau’s application to join it had been rejected. Once again, the sight of a biracial pair of inmates roaming the maximum-security prison with cameras and tape recorders strapped over their shoulders became a familiar sight.

During the next five years, the pair produced another string of extraordinary editions of the *Angolite*. The best of their work gathered national acclaim when it was published in 1992 by Random House. Also in 1992, Wickberg won the one reward that has been denied to Rideau every year - release. On August 13, 1992, Rideau walked his colleague to the front gate of the penitentiary as reporters, including one from the *New York Times*, watched. “I’m leaving you here, Bud,” said Wikberg.



This illustration from the spring 1952 issue of *the Atlantian* reflects the sense of isolation felt by many convicts. For them the inmate press represented a way to reach the outside world. Its decline has diminished the connections between the two worlds.

“Glad to see you go,” replied Rideau. “Have enough fun for me.”²

Two years later, in October 1994, Wikberg died of cancer in the company of his wife, Kay, whom he had met through the mail while he was in prison. “Do I think the good I’ve done overshadows the bad that I’ve done? No. I don’t have that feeling,” he said days before his death, when he declined his morphine medication to submit to a radio interview. “I think there’s a lot more I could do, and instead that I regret because I want to do some more. I’m just not going to get a chance to.”³

In December 1994, Rideau gave up the day-to-day responsibilities of editing the *Angolite* after an eighteen-year tenure and accepted the post of editor emeritus. He was given license to speak outside the prison and has even flown to Washington for an address. His prospect for release, however, continued to be dim in 1997. In Louisiana, the law bars parole from being given to life-termers, and succeeding governors continued to refuse clemency to Rideau, despite the fact that virtually every correctional official tried to persuade the politicians that his leaving Angola was long overdue. “He needs to go free,” said Burl Cain, Angola’s warden. “He’s rehabilitated.”⁴

In a *New York Times* article reviewing the so-called radical chic’s love affair with inmate authors, Francis X. Clines wrote that publicity can be a powerful force in winning an inmate’s release, “but also wayward, as in the case of Wilbert Rideau, pound for pound the best working journalist in America’s prisons.” Rideau, he said, has become “so celebrated that a counter-clemency campaign took root that annually denies freedom to him, long after less rehabilitated felons were freed.”⁵ A fate not unlike that which befell Tom Runyon.

But while the *Angolite* prospered in the 1980s and 1990s, the reverse held true for prison publications that began their search for a similar editorial freedom at about the same time. The most evident defeat for the penal press was in California, where virtually none of its prison papers published in 1995, and those that did belied their impressive history.

To survive in conditions hostile to prison journalism, inmates have come up with creative solutions. At the Massachusetts Correctional Institution in Norfolk, an inmate moved the newspaper out of the prison, literally. Luke Janusz, who was sent to prison in 1979 on a variety of robbery and holdup convictions, took over the *Colony* as editor in 1989. Well educated, with a B.A. and an M.A. from Boston University, Janusz made plans to rescue the

moribund sixteen-page newspaper that had been founded in 1935. First, he lobbied the inmates serving on a governing board for a four-thousand-dollar appropriation from the profits earned by the inmate-run commissary. To obtain the money, Janusz vowed to cover issues that were close to their interests. Second, he built a staff of inmates who would not be easily intimidated. Third, he gave the publication a new name: *Odyssey*, in remembrance of Odysseus's long voyage home.

The first issue of *Odyssey*, published in early 1990, was hard-hitting. It featured an article charging that the new modular housing units were overly repressive. After reading it, apparently for the first time, the administration put Janusz in solitary confinement, claiming he was the "silent leader" of an ongoing hunger strike. "The first time I was lugged to the hole I said to myself, Aha, this will happen again and again. There's no way a prison magazine can exist unless the prisoners own the financial and administrative base.' What I needed to do was set up a corporation without the DOC [Department of Corrections] knowing about it."⁶

Janusz followed his own advice. Using money raised outside the prison, Janusz bought a computer, hired a person to work on it, and contracted with a press to print *Odyssey*. Soon, Janusz was editing a prison magazine that was beyond the walls and the control of the prison. Authorities banned his publication from their prisons, leaving outsiders as the only readers of this penal publication. In an unusual twist, when Janusz was outside prison himself, inmates were able to obtain his publication. In 1992, after Janusz was released, he continued publishing *Odyssey* from his apartment in Dedham, Massachusetts. That same year, Janusz's attorney persuaded prison authorities to rescind the ban they placed on *Odyssey*.

Another prison publication that found a means to survive by straddling the wall is *Prison Legal News (PLN)*, published by two inmates of the Washington State Reformatory at Monroe. Paul Wright, a convicted murderer, and Ed Mead, who was sentenced to eighteen years in prison for his role in a bombing incident, created *PLN* in 1989 as a tool to assist inmates dealing with legal issues in prison. "It's like the farm report. If you're a farmer, you want to get the farm report," Wright said. "Part of what we do is let prisoners know what their rights are."⁷

Mead was released from prison and no longer works with *PLN* because of a court-imposed ban on his associating with the publication. His place was taken by Daniel Pens, a convicted sex offender. Each week, Wright and Pens

study court rulings in the prison law library and then, using their own computers, sit down and write articles and editorials. Accounts of prison disruptions, legislative initiatives in other states, and other prison news are sent to the pair by avid correspondents from around the nation's penal institutions.

Their writings are then sent out of the prison to a volunteer staff who handle the layout, printing, and mailing. In the end, *PLN* looks more like an academic journal than a prison magazine. Its penal perspective, however, is evident throughout the text. In the March 1995 issue, for instance, Wright took issue with the committee appointment of Ida Ballasiotes, a Washington state representative. "It is politically safe to bash prisoners because there are not moneyed interests supporting them," wrote Wright. "Given Ida's obvious bias and personal agenda and lack of qualifications, why is she heading the corrections committee?"⁸

PLN, which is published monthly, had 1,600 subscribers in 1995 paying from twelve dollars (the inmate rate) to thirty-five dollars (outside readers) a year. Wright's father processed the subscriptions from the family home in Florida. And in 1995, *PLN* joined cyberspace by going online.

PLN has earned respect in the legal world equal to that given to the *Angolite* in journalism. Subscribers include half of the nation's attorneys general, district court judges, defense attorneys, and many law libraries. Incongruously, considering its editorial mission, *PLN* had greater success initially with readers outside of prison than inside because it was repeatedly banned by corrections officials. In 1995, after six years of publication, few authorities - whom *PLN* calls "prisoncrats"- continued to prevent *PLN* from reaching inmates. Both *Odyssey* and *PLN* found a way in the 1990s to carry on the tradition of prison journalism begun 197 years ago by a destitute attorney confined to a debtors' prison. But with the exception of these two journals, most inmate-journalists during the past two decades have typed "-30-", the keys journalists used on their old, black Underwood typewriters to mark the end of a story.

Epilogue

During most of the history of prison journalism, the newspaper was the nation's most important medium. As the Victorian journalist Edward Dicey noted, "the American might be defined as a newspaper reading animal."¹ But changing work habits of families, the advent of electronic media, and the increasing disinterest in public affairs have removed the newspaper from the central role it once held. "With so many changes, it sometimes seems the traditional newspaper itself will be replaced," wrote John Maxwell Hamilton and George A. Krimsky in their book *Hold the Press: The Inside Story on Newspapers*.

Thus it is not entirely surprising that the age of the penal press may also be coming to an end. The calamitous pressures of overcrowding and under-funding in penal institutions has caused most prisons to give up their publications. The changing media-consumption habits of society will probably doom the remaining ones. The prevalence of television in the prison has certainly made a printed prison newspaper seem anachronistic to its readers. But unlike in society, there is nothing in prison that is replacing the lost newspapers.

As the penal press disappears, I am reminded of a promotional brochure published in the 1970s by the John Howard Association, a prison reform organization. On the front, it featured a silhouetted photograph of a prison guard peering through the night's darkness at a bank of cells four or five stories tall. "They watch the prisoners," said the brochure, referring to the guard. "But who watches them?" While prison journalism was never a panacea, it did at times serve as a means for redress for a disenfranchised segment of our citizenry. For most inmates, there will be no media acting as watchdogs in their community unless there is a prison newspaper.

There is, however, a greater misfortune here. Over its history, the penal press has continually lost ground while the free press has gained. With the end of a viable prison press, freedom of speech will become an increasingly

distant concept to inmates. This is a serious mistake. Despite complaints regarding the conduct of the press at times, American culture still considers the free press its guardian of freedom. Most Americans continue to agree with Alexis de Tocqueville's remark made more than a century ago, that "in order to enjoy the inestimable benefits that the liberty of the press ensures, it is necessary to submit to the inevitable evils which it engenders."²

Denying prisoners freedom of speech is suicidal. In the confines of our fetid prisons, entire generations of youths are learning life-shaping lessons antithetical to democracy and liberty. Someday these inmates will be among us again. Mary Belle Harris, who ran the Alderson prison for women after a distinguished career in corrections, left us the following warning among her writings:

We must remember always that the "doors of prisons swing both ways"; that most of their tenants are coming back to the community to sit beside us in the street-cars, and beside the children of our families at the movies, with no bars between and no walls around them. Unless we have built within them a wall of self-respect, moral integrity, and a desire to be an asset to the community instead of a menace, we have not protected society - which is ourselves - from the criminal. Whether he deserves it or not, we owe it to ourselves as citizens of an enlightened country to proceed more intelligently in our treatment of the prisoner.³

Appendix I

American Penal Press Contest Winners 1965-1990

Between 1965 and 1990, the Department of Journalism at Southern Illinois University sponsored and managed a national competition for prison publications. For the world of penal journalism, these prizes were its Pulitzers. At its peak, the competition attracted more than 1,200 entries for prizes ranging from Best Prison Newspaper, Best Mimeographed Publication, and Best Prison Magazine, to Best Sports Story, Best Column, Best Editorial, and Best Feature. The competition also bestowed on most years the Charles C. Clayton Award for best single journalistic performance during the year. It was named after Clayton, who was said to be the first person to teach a journalism class in prison and was the founder of the competition.

Listed below are the overall winners during the twenty-five-year life of the competition.

1965

Lantern Daily Best Mimeographed Publication
Shelby County Penal Farm
Memphis, TN

1966

San Quentin News
California State Prison
San Quentin, CA

Best Prison Newspaper

Raiford Record
Florida State Prison
Raiford, FL

Best Prison Magazine
(new category in 1966)

The Cardinal
West Virginia Industrial School for Boys
Grafton, WV

Best Mimeographed
Publication

Mark S. Van Landingham
Menard Time
Illinois State Penitentiary
Menard, IL

Charles C. Clayton Award
(new category in 1966)

1967

San Quentin News
California State Prison San Quentin, CA

Best Prison Newspaper

The Presidio
Iowa State Penitentiary
Fort Madison, IA

Best Prison Magazine

The Mountainer
California Conservation Center
Susanville, CA

Best Mimeographed Publication

John Leckey
Raiford Record
Florida State Prison
Raiford, FL

Charles C. Clayton Award

1968

The Echo

Best Prison Newspaper

Texas Department of Corrections
Huntsville, TX

Time Best Prison Magazine
Illinois State Penitentiary
Joliet, IL

The Angolite Best Mimeographed Publication
Louisiana State Penitentiary
Angola, LA

San Quentin News Charles C. Clayton Award
California State Prison
San Quentin, CA

1969

Menard Time Best Prison Newspaper
Illinois State Penitentiary
Menard, IL

Interpreter Best Prison Magazine
Colorado State Penitentiary
Canon City, CO

The Hilltopper Best Mimeographed Publication
California Correctional Facility
Tehachapi, CA

Harley Sorenson Charles C. Clayton Award
The Prison Mirror
Minnesota State Prison
Stillwater, MN

1970

Menard Time Best Prison Newspaper
Illinois State Penitentiary

Menard, IL

The Enchanted News
Penitentiary of New Mexico
Santa Fe, NM

Best Prison Magazine

Vacaville Star
California Medical Facility
Vacaville, CA

Best Mimeographed Publication

Bill White
The Echo
Texas Department of Corrections
Huntsville, TX

Charles C. Clayton Award

1971

The Echo
Texas Department of Corrections
Huntsville, TX

Best Prison Newspaper

The Messenger
South Dakota State Penitentiary
Sioux Falls, SD

Best Prison Magazine

The Weekly Scene
Connecticut Correctional Institution
Somers, CT

Best Mimeographed Publication

The Presidio
Iowa State Penitentiary
Fort Madison, IA

Charles C. Clayton Award

1972

San Quentin News
California State Prison
San Quentin, CA

Best Prison Newspaper

Island Lantern
U.S. Penitentiary
McNeil Island, WA

Best Prison Magazine

T.I. News
U.S. Correctional Facility at Terminal
Island San Pedro, CA

Best Mimeographed Publication

No winner

Charles C. Clayton Award

1973

The Echo
Texas Department of Corrections
Huntsville, TX

Best Prison Newspaper

The Lakeshore Outlook
Indiana State Prison
Michigan City, IN

Best Prison Magazine

Reaching Out
Southside State Farm
State Farm, VA

Best Mimeographed Publication

Charles DuRain (cartoonist)
Castle

Charles C. Clayton Award

Kentucky State Prison
Eddyville, KY

1974

The Spectator
Southern Michigan Prison
Jackson, MI

Best Prison Newspaper

Interpreter Best Prison Magazine
Colorado State Penitentiary
Canon City, CO

The Classic Best Mimeographed
Georgia Diagnostic and Classification
Center Publication
Jackson, GA

The Messenger Charles C. Clayton Award
South Dakota State Penitentiary
Sioux Falls, SD

1975

The Echo Best Prison Newspaper
Texas Department of Corrections
Huntsville, TX

Best Scene Best Prison Magazine
Wyoming State Penitentiary
Rawlins, WY

Gazette Best Mimeographed Publication
Federal Prison Camp
Eglin Air Force Base
Eglin, FL

No winner Charles C. Clayton Award

1976

Menard Time Best Prison Newspaper
Illinois State Penitentiary
Menard, IL

Messenger Best Prison Magazine
South Dakota State Penitentiary

Sioux Falls, SD

The Conqueror
Maryland House of Correction
Jessup, MD

Best Mimeographed Publication

Texas Department of Corrections*
Huntsville, TX

Charles C. Clayton Award

1977

Menard Time
Illinois State Penitentiary
Menard, IL

Best Prison Newspaper

Messenger
South Dakota State Penitentiary
Sioux Falls, SD

Best Prison Magazine

Reality House News
Federal Correctional Institution
Ashland, KY

Best Mimeographed Publication

Wilbert Rideau and Tommy Mason
The Angolite[†]
Louisiana State Penitentiary
Angola, LA

Charles C. Clayton Award

1978

The Echo
Texas Department of Corrections
Huntsville, TX

Best Prison Newspaper

Messenger
South Dakota State Penitentiary
Sioux Falls, SD

Best Prison Magazine

Vacaville Star
California Medical Facility
Vacaville, CA

Best Mimeographed Publication

No winner

Charles C. Clayton Award

1979

Menard Time
Illinois State Penitentiary
Menard, IL

Best Prison Newspaper

Messenger
South Dakota State Penitentiary
Sioux Falls, SD

Best Prison Magazine

La Roca
Arizona State Prison
Florence, AZ

Best Mimeographed Publication

FYSK Magazine
Virginia State Penitentiary
Richmond, VA

Charles C. Clayton Award

1980

The GSP News
Georgia State Prison
Reidsville, GA

Best Prison Newspaper

The Angolite
Louisiana State Penitentiary
Angola, LA

Best Prison Magazine

The Doir' Times
Eglin Federal Prison Camp
Eglin Air Force Base
Eglin, FL

Best Mimeographed Publication

No winner

Charles C. Clayton Award

1981

San Quentin News
California State Prison
San Quentin, CA

Best Prison Newspaper

The Angolite
Louisiana State Penitentiary
Angola, LA

Best Prison Magazine

T.L News
U.S. Correctional Facility at Terminal
Island
San Pedro, CA

Best Mimeographed
Publication

The Interim
Tennessee State Penitentiary
Nashville, TN

Charles C. Clayton Award

1892

Menard Time
Illinois State Penitentiary
Menard, IL

Best Prison Newspaper

The Angolite
Louisiana State Penitentiary
Angola, LA

Best Prison Magazine

Vacaville Star
California Medical Facility
Vacaville, CA

Best Mimeographed Publication

No winner

Charles C. Clayton Award

1983

The Echo
Texas Department of Corrections
Huntsville, TX

Best Prison Newspaper

The Angolite
Louisiana State Penitentiary
Angola, LA

Best Prison Magazine

The Forum
Centralia Correctional Center
Centralia, IL

Best Mimeographed Publication

Vienna in Progress
Illinois Correctional Center
Vienna, IL

Charles C. Clayton Award

1984

Menard Time
Illinois State Penitentiary
Menard, IL

Best Prison Newspaper

WYNOT
Alcoholism Program
Texas Department of Corrections
Huntsville, TX

Best Prison Magazine

Vacavalley Star
California Medical Facility
Vacaville, CA

Best Mimeographed Publication

No winner

Charles C. Clayton Award

1985

The Prison Mirror

Best Prison Newspaper

Minnesota State Prison
Stillwater, MN

WYNOT
Alcoholism Program
Texas Department of Corrections
Huntsville, TX

Huron Valley Monitor
Huron Valley Men's Facility
Ypsilanti, MI

Menard Time
Illinois State Penitentiary
Menard, IL

1986

The Prison Mirror
Minnesota State Prison
Stillwater, MN

WYNOT
Alcoholism Program
Texas Department of Corrections
Huntsville, TX

Huron Valley Monitor
Huron Valley Mens Facility
Ypsilanti, MI

No winner

Best Prison Magazine

Best Mimeographed Publication

Charles C. Clayton Award

Best Prison Newspaper

Best Prison Magazine

Best Mimeographed Publication

Charles C. Clayton Award

1987

The Echo
Texas Department of Corrections
Huntsville, TX

Best Prison Newspaper

The Angolite
Louisiana State Penitentiary
Angola, LA

Best Prison Magazine

Danville Vanguard
Danville Correctional Center
Danville, IL

Best Mimeographed Publication

The Prison Mirror
Minnesota State Prison
Stillwater, MN

Charles C. Clayton Award

1988

The Prison Mirror
Minnesota State Prison
Stillwater, MN

Best Prison Newspaper

WYNOT
Alcoholism Program
Texas Department of Corrections
Huntsville, TX

Best Prison Magazine

No winner

Best Mimeographed Publication

No winner

Charles C. Clayton Award

1989

The Echo
Texas Department of Corrections
Huntsville, TX

Best Prison Newspaper

Messenger
South Dakota State Penitentiary
Sioux Falls, SD

Best Prison Magazine

Danville Vanguard
Danville Correctional Center
Danville, IL

Best Mimeographed Publication

No winner

Charles C. Clayton Award

1990

Danville Vanguard
Danville Correctional Center
Danville, IL

Best Prison Newspaper

Skytower Magazine
Kentucky State Reformatory
LaGrange, KY

Best Prison Magazine

Long Line Writer
Cummins Unit
Arkansas Department of Corrections
Grady, AR

Best Mimeographed Publication

*The award, presented in previous years to individuals and publications, was awarded for the first time to a corrections department. The department supported the publication of two newspapers and two magazines within its prison system.

†In that year's competition, Rideau received the Best Picture, Best Editorial with Mason, and Best News Story with Billy Sinclair.

Appendix II

Prison Publications by State

This list of prison publications was compiled over the course of my research for this book. It is also drawn from library databases and from a variety of sources listed in the bibliography.

This list does not include juvenile institution publications. Many, if not all, were like school newspapers, published under such conditions that they excluded any free expression.

A number of publications changed their names over the course of their history. If one publication is known to be the continuation of another with a different name, the sequence has been indicated with the word “later.” It has not always been possible to determine whether papers of different names were continuations or separate entities. If the word “later” is omitted, the relationship between the papers is unclear.

The names of the prisons also frequently changed, reflecting the newest fads in penology. Many others have closed. Thus in many of the listings the prison named may no longer exist or its current name may be very different.

A few other features of this appendix warrant a brief explanation:

(1951- 1967): A full run of dates in parentheses indicates that the paper began publication in the first year listed and ceased publication in the second year listed.

(1951-): A year followed only by a dash indicates that the paper began publication in the listed year and is, to the best of the author's knowledge, still being published.

(1951-*) A year followed by a dash and an asterisk indicates that the paper began publication in the listed year and ceased publication in an unknown year.

[1951-] Years in brackets indicate that the paper is known to have been

1952]: published during those years but may have been published in other years as well.

Clock: Newspapers listed in this ***bold italic*** type are discussed within the body of this book.

Alabama

Draper Inmate (1939-*); later *Pens & Bars* (years unknown); later *Newsletter* [1980-*]

Draper Prison, Speigner

Kilby Sun (1961-*)

Kilby Prison and Receiving and Classification Center, Montgomery

Reporter (1961-*)

Draper Correctional Center, Elmore

Wings Over (1951-*)

Kilby Prison, Kilby

Alaska

Eagle Cry (1993-) Hiland Mountain and Meadow Creek Correctional Centers, Eagle River

Reflections (1988-) State Correctional Center, Fairbanks

Williwaw Journal Adult Conservation Camp, Palmer (1962-*)

Arizona

Cactus Blossom [1950]; *Vanguard* (years unknown); *Desert Press* (1933-*); *El Saguaro* (1963-*); *La Roca* [1979-1984]

State Prison, Florence

Perruville Times [1982-1986]

State Prison, Goodyear

Arkansas

Long Line Writer [1983-]

Cummins Unit, Grady

California

<i>Clarion</i> [1970, 1975]	State Institution for Women, Frontera
<i>Crossroads</i> (1948-*)	Vocational Institute for Men, Lancaster
<i>Hilltopper</i> (1955-*)	State Correctional Institution, Tehachapi
<i>Observer</i> (1936-*)	Folsom Prison, Represa
<i>Pioneer News</i> (1941-*)	Institute for Men, Chino
<i>San Quentin News</i> (1940-*)	San Quentin Prison, San Quentin
<i>Soledad Star-News</i> (1947-*)	California Training Facility, Soledad
<i>Vacaville Star</i> (1955-*)	Medical Facility, Vacaville

Colorado

<i>Buena Vista</i> (1958-*); later <i>Spotlight News</i> [1986]	State Reformatory, Buena Vista
<i>Interpreter</i> (1966-*)	State Penitentiary, Canon City
<i>Rocky Mountain Breezes</i> [1942]	Federal Correctional Institution, Denver
<i>Writing on the Walls</i> [1990]	Correctional Facility, Canon City

Connecticut

<i>Bridge</i> (1915-*)	State Prison, Somers
<i>Hour Glass</i> [1942]	State Prison and Farm for Women, Niantic
<i>Monthly Record</i> (1896-*)	State Prison, Wetherfield
<i>Little Nutmeg</i> (1941-*); <i>Nutmeg Guidon</i> (1941- *); <i>Emancipator</i> [1941-1942]	Federal Reformatory, Danbury
<i>New View</i> (1959-*)	State Prison, Hazardville

Weekly Scene (1957-*)

State Prison, Somers

Delaware

Big House Gazette (1950-*) Workhouse, Wilmington

Isthmus [1996] Sussex Correctional Institution, Georgetown

New Light [1996] State Correctional Center, Smyrna

District of Columbia

Her Echo (1961-*) Women's Reformatory, Occoquan, Virginia

Insider (1947-*) District of Columbia Jail, District of Columbia

Time & Tied (1946-*); *Poop Sheet* (1947-*) Lorton, Virginia

Florida

<i>Apalachee Diary</i> (1950-*)	State Correctional Institution, Chattahoochee
<i>Do You Know?</i> [1977, 1986]	State Correctional Institution, Belle Glade
<i>Dopester</i> (1958-*)	State Correctional Institution, Avon Park
<i>Fla-Co-Lo</i> (1957-*)	State Correctional Institution, Lowell
<i>Raiford Record</i> (1935-*)	Raiford Prison, Raiford
<i>Road Prison</i> (1958-*)	Division of Correctional Road Prisons, Tallahassee
<i>UCI Broadcast</i> [1978-1979]	Union Correctional Institution, Raiford
<i>Voice</i> (1931-*)	Federal Reformatory, Tallahassee

Georgia

<i>Beacon</i> (1949-*)	State Industrial Institute, Alto
<i>Good Words</i> (1912-1938); later <i>Atlantian</i> (1938- *)	Federal Penitentiary, Atlanta
<i>Spokesman</i> (1939-*); later <i>GSPNews</i> [1979, 1984, 1985]	State Prison, Reidsville

Hawaii

<i>Halawa Bulletin</i> (1962-*)	Honolulu Jail, Oahu
<i>Pahao</i> (1935-*)	Oahy Prison, Honolulu
<i>Pahao Nuhou</i> (1955-*)	State Prison, Honolulu

Idaho

Walled City Bulletin (1939-*); *Acme* (1952-1953); *Clock* (1947-1976) State Penitentiary, Boise

Lochsa Pioneer [1942] Federal Correctional Institution, Kooskia

Illinois

Can Opener (1917) Cook County Jail, Chicago

<i>Forum</i> (1980-*)	Centralia Correctional Center, Centralia
<i>Illinoian</i> (1940-*); later <i>Stateville Roundhouse</i> (1979- [1980]); <i>Stateville Time</i> [1986]	State Penitentiary, Stateville
<i>Prison Post</i> (1914-*); later <i>J-S Time</i> (1935-*)	State Penitentiary, Joliet
<i>Menard Time</i> (1934)	State Penitentiary, Menard
<i>Pathfinder</i> (1949-*)	State Reformatory for Women, Dwight
<i>Pioneer</i> (years unknown); <i>Pontiac Flag News</i> (1964-*)	State Penitentiary, Pontiac
<i>Communique</i> [1982]; <i>S.E.E.D.</i> [1986]	State Correctional Center, Dwight
<i>Telegrapham</i> (1980-)	Graham Correctional Center, Hillsboro
<i>Vanguard</i> (1986-*)	State Correctional Center, Danville
<i>Vienna in Progress</i> [1986, 1990]	State Correctional Center, Vienna
<i>Voice</i> [1986]; <i>Bullet</i> (1980-)	State Correctional Center, Jacksonville

Indiana

<i>Bourne</i> (1939-*); later <i>Lake Shore Outlook</i> (1949-*); later <i>Bar-Less</i> (1951-*); later <i>Encourager</i> (1953- 1966)	State Prison, Michigan City
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<i>Chit Chat</i> (1957-1963)	State Prison for Women, Indianapolis
<i>Hill Top Crier</i> (1934-*)	State Farm, Greencastle
<i>Hot Drops</i> [1896]	State Reformatory, Jeffersonville
<i>Reflector</i> (1897-1915); (1922-*)	State Reformatory, Pendleton
<i>Terrescope</i> [1942,1972]	Federal Penitentiary, Terre Haute

Iowa

<i>Anamosa Prison Press</i> (years unknown); later <i>Hawkeye</i> (1898-*)	State Reformatory, Anamosa
<i>Presidio</i> (1934-*)	State Prison, Fort Madison

Kansas

<i>Harbinger</i> (1939-*); later <i>Reformatory Herald</i> [1936-*]	State Reformatory, Hutchinson
<i>Lancer</i> (1965-*)	State Industrial Farm for Women, Lansing
<i>New Era</i> (1914-1967)	Federal Prison, Leavenworth
<i>Square Deal</i> ([1916]-*); later <i>Stretch</i> (1957-*); later <i>Concept</i> [1975-*]	State Penitentiary, Lansing

Kentucky

<i>Barometer</i> (1942-*)	Federal Reformatory, Ashland
<i>Castle on the Cumberland</i> (1961-*); later <i>Root</i> [1972]; <i>Inter-Prison Press</i> [1974-1980]	State Penitentiary, Eddyville

<i>Flak</i> [1975]; later <i>EC. Eye</i> [1979]	Federal Correctional Institution, Lexington
<i>Hours</i> (1936-*); later <i>Skytower News</i> (1940-*)	State Reformatory, La Grange
<i>Rehabilitator</i> (1940-*)	State Prison, Eddyville

Louisiana

<i>Angola Argus</i> (1940-*); later <i>Angolite</i> (1952)	State Penitentiary, Angola
<i>Chainlink Chronicle</i> [1986-1996]	Washington Correctional Institute, Angie
<i>Hunt Walk Talk</i> [1981-1984]	Hunt Correctional Center, St. Gabriel
<i>Insider</i> [1996]	Phelps Correctional Center, DeQuincy
<i>Straight Low</i> [1995-1996]	Dixon Correctional Institute, Jackson

Maine

<i>Vox</i> (1942); later <i>Tommy-Town News</i> (years unknown); later <i>Coastline</i> [1975]	State Prison, Thomaston
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Maryland

<i>Courier</i> (1952-[1963]*)	State Penitentiary, Baltimore
<i>Conqueror</i> (1962-*)	State House of Correction, Jessup
<i>Roxbury Review</i> [1984,1986]	State Correctional Institution, Hagerstown
<i>Soundings</i> (1950-*)	State Correctional Institution for Women, Jessup
<i>Trumpet</i> (1954-*)	State Correctional Institution, Hagerstown

Massachusetts

<i>Beacon</i> (1960-*)	State Correctional Institution, Bridgewater
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Colony (1935-*)	Prison Colony, Norfolk
<i>Harmony News</i> (1945-*)	State Correctional Institution, Framingham
Mentor (1898-*)	State Prison, Charleston
Odyssey (1990-*)	Correctional Institute, Norfolk
Our Paper (1885-*)	State Correctional Institution, Concord

Michigan

<i>Hilltop News</i> (1928-*)	State Reformatory, Ionia
<i>Monitor</i> (1982-*)	Huron Valley Men's Facility, Ypsilanti
Spectator (1930-*)	State Prison, Jackson
<i>Voice</i> (1930s-*)	Detroit House of Correction, Plymouth
<i>Weekly Progress</i> (1938-*) ; later <i>Northlander</i> [1944]	State Prison, Marquette

Minnesota

<i>Gist</i> [1942]; later <i>Parrot</i> [1975]	Federal Correctional Institution, Sandstone
<i>Perspective</i> [1986]	State Correctional Institution, Oak Park Heights
Prison Mirror (1887-)	State Prison, Stillwater
<i>Reflector</i> (1935-*)	State Reformatory for Women, Shakopee
<i>Reformatory Pillar</i> [1977]	State Reformatory, St. Cloud

Mississippi

<i>Inside World</i> (1949-*)	State Prison, Parchman
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Missouri

<i>Student</i> (years unknown); later Jefftown Journal (1949-*)	State Penitentiary, Jefferson City
<i>Flood Light</i> (1945-*)	State Penitentiary, Jefferson City

<i>Ozark Echo</i> [1942]	Federal Medical Facility for Prisoners, Springfield
<i>Rocketeer</i> (1963-*)	State Medium-Security Prison, Moberly

Montana

<i>MP News</i> (1962-*)	State Prison, Deer Lodge
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Nebraska

<i>Forum</i> (1938-*)	State Penitentiary, Lincoln
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Nevada

<i>Sagebrush</i> (1960-*)	State Prison, Carson City
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New Jersey

<i>Ad Lib</i> (1960-*)	State Reformatory for Women, Clinton
<i>Better Citizen</i> (years unknown); later <i>Dome</i> [1936, 1970, 1975]	State Prison, Rahway
<i>Inside B'n</i> (1940-*); later <i>Bulletin</i> [1944]	State Reformatory, Bordentown
<i>Stars & Bars</i> (1950-*)	State Reformatory, Annandale
<i>Viewpoint</i> (1944-*)	State Prison, Trenton

New Mexico

<i>El Boleton</i> [1946]; later <i>Enchanted News</i> (1957-1980); later <i>Santa Fe Prison News</i> (1982-*)	State Prison, Santa Fe
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New York

<i>Arthur Kill Alliance</i> [1986]	Arthur Kill Correctional Facility, Staten Island
<i>Attican</i> [1936]	State Prison, Attica
<i>Auburn Collective</i> [1974–1979]	State Correctional Facility, Auburn
<i>Forlorn Hope</i> (1800–*)	Debtors Prison, New York
<i>Greenhaven Monthly</i> [1978–1979]	Green Haven Correctional Facility, Stormville
<i>Observer</i> [1916]	Blackwell's Island, New York
<i>Rikers Review</i> (1939–)	State Correctional Institution for Men, Rikers Island
<i>Solitaire</i> (1887–*); later <i>Star of Hope</i> (1889–1920); later <i>Bulletin</i> (1920–1921)	Sing Sing Prison, Ossining
<i>Summary</i> (1883–*)	State Reformatory, Elmira
<i>Tab-O-Graph</i> [1944]	State Prison, Clinton

North Carolina

<i>Odom Hi-Rider</i> (1961–*)	State Prison, Odom
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Ohio

<i>Buccaneer</i> (1961–*); later <i>Advocate</i> [1970,1975]	State Correctional Institution, Lebanon
<i>Flashlight</i> [1942]; later <i>Chiliarch</i> (years unknown)	Federal Reformatory, Chillicothe
<i>MC Eye</i> (1956–*)	State Correctional Institution, Marion

<i>Reformatory Outlook</i> (1903-*); later <i>New Day</i> (1926-*); later <i>Criterion</i> (1927-*)	State Reformatory, Mansfield
O.P. News (1892-*)	State Penitentiary, Columbus
Prison Farmer (1932-*)	State Prison Farm, London

Oklahoma

<i>Concepts</i> [1990]	Joseph Harp Correctional Center, Lexington
<i>Eye Opener</i> (1936-*); later <i>Soonerland</i> [1942]	State Penitentiary, McAlester
<i>Outlook</i> (1934-*)	Federal Reformatory, El Reno
<i>News-Views</i> (1949-*)	State Reformatory, Granite

Oregon

<i>Lend-a-hand</i> (1903-*); later <i>Shadows</i> (1936-*); later <i>Viewpoint</i> [1972]	State Penitentiary, Salem
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Pennsylvania

<i>Umpire</i> (years unknown); later <i>Eastern Echo</i> (1956-*)	State Correctional Institution, Philadelphia
<i>Headliner</i> (1947-*)	State Correctional Institution, Camp Hill
<i>Keystone</i> [1944]	Western Penitentiary, Pittsburgh
<i>Periscope</i> (1933-*); <i>Lens</i> (1940-*); <i>Friday Flyer</i> [1972]; <i>First Step</i> [1972]	Federal Penitentiary, Lewisburg
<i>Muncy Times</i> [1942]	State Industrial Home for Women, Muncy
<i>Prism</i> (1962-*)	State Correctional Institution, Muncy
<i>Reformatory Record</i> (1889-*)	State Reformatory
<i>Rockview</i> (1950-*)	Western Penitentiary [Rockview Branch], Bellefonte
<i>Supporter</i> (1800*)	Debtors Prison, Philadelphia
<i>Vibrations</i> (1970-1971)	State Correctional Institute, Pittsburgh

Rhode Island

<i>Times</i> (1948-*); later <i>Hope Press</i> (1955-*)	State Prison, Howard
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South Carolina

<i>About Face</i> (1957-*)	State Penitentiary, Columbia
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South Dakota

<i>Messenger</i> (1921-[1942]#)	State Penitentiary, Sioux Falls
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Tennessee

<i>This Is It</i> (1951-*); later <i>Interim</i> [1986]	State Penitentiary, Nashville
<i>Inside Story</i> [1990]	Middle Tennessee Reception Center, Nashville
<i>Maximum Times</i> [1990]	Riverbend Maximum Security Institution, Nashville
<i>Only Voice</i> [1990]	Turney Center Industrial Prison, Only
<i>Paragon</i> [1986]	Lake County Regional Correctional Facility, Tiptonville
<i>Verdict</i> [1986]	Southeastern State Regional Correctional Facility, Pikeville

Texas

<i>B. Sentinel</i> (years unknown); later <i>El Centinela</i> (years unknown); later <i>Fronterizo</i> * [1941]	Federal Reformatory, La Tuna
<i>Monitor</i> (1909-[1913]); <i>Echo</i> (1934-); <i>Joint Endeavor</i> [1976, 1984]	State Prison System, Huntsville
<i>Seagazette</i> (1948-1949); later <i>This 'N That</i> (1949- *)	Federal Reformatory, Seagoville
<i>Spot Light</i> [1942]	Federal Correctional Institution, Texarkana
<i>Wynot</i> [1974, 1984, 1986]	State Prison System, Huntsville

Utah

<i>The Point</i> (1947-*); later <i>Pointer News</i> (1957- *)	State Prison, Draper
<i>Utah Penwiper</i> (1932-*)	State Prison, Salt Lake City

Vermont

<i>Green Mountain Graphic</i> (1955-*)	State Prison and House of Correction for Men, Windsor
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ETC (1963-*)

State Women's Reformatory, Rutland

Virginia

Citizen (1941-*)

State Industrial Farm for
Women, Goochland

Beacon [1942]; *FYSK Magazine* [1972-
1979]; later *Virginian* [1984]

State Penitentiary, Richmond

Washington

Hornet (years unknown); later *Totem* [1942]

State Reformatory,
Monroe

Our Dope Book (1913); later *Our View Point* (years
unknown); later *Outlook* (years unknown)

State Penitentiary,
Walla Walla

Lantern (1924-*)

Federal Penitentiary,
McNeil Island

Prison Legal News (1989-)

State Reformatory,
Monroe

West Virginia

Eagle (1933-*)

Federal Reformatory for Women,
Alderson

Penscope (1948-*)
[1978-1979]; later *New Penscope*
[1978-1979]

State Penitentiary, Moundsville

Wisconsin

Candle [1943]; later *Wampum World*
[1970-1977]

State Prison, Waupun

Bay Banner (1952-*)
[1974]; later *Panorama*
Press [1974]

State Reformatory, Green Bay

WCI Solar Screen [1972]

State Correctional Institution,
Fox Lake

Wyoming

Best Scene (1962-*)

State Penitentiary, Rawlins

Internment Camp Newspapers

Arizona

Gila New Courier (1942-1945)

Gila

Poston Official Bulletin (1942); *Poston Chronicle* (1942-1945)

Poston

Arkansas

Communiqué (years unknown); *Denson Tribune* (1942-1943)

Denson

Rohwer Outpost (1942-1945); *Rohwer Daybreak* (1945); *Hi-Lites* (1945); *Roar* (1945); *Rohwer Transmitter* (years unknown); *Rohwer Relocator* (1945)

Rohwer

California

Manzanar Free Press (1942-1945)

Manzanar

Newell Star (1944-1945)

Newell

Santa Anita Pacemaker (1942)

Santa Anita

Tanforan Totalizer (1942)

Tanforan

Tulean Dispatch (1942-1943)

Tulean

Colorado

Granada Pioneer (1942-1944)

Amache

Idaho

Minidoka Irrigator (1942-1945)

Hunt

Utah

Topaz Times (1942-1945)

Topaz

Wyoming

Heart Mountain Sentinel (1942-1945)

Heart Mountain

**Written in Spanish.*

Notes

Introduction

1. Lou Miller, interview with author, April 20, 1980.
2. James F. Fixx, "Journalists Behind Bars" *Saturday Review*, March 9, 1963, 54.
3. *Prisoners in 1996* (Washington: Justice Department Bureau of Justice Statistics, 1997). For up-to-date statistics, view BJS's homepage on the World Wide Web at <http://www.ojp.usdoj.gov/bjs>.
4. In 1970, federal prisons held 10 percent of the inmates; in 1993 that had dropped to 8 percent.
5. Robert Johnson, *Hard Times: Understanding and Reforming the Prison*, Second Edition (Belmont, CA: Wadsworth, 1996), 12.
6. Johnson, 12.
7. The figures are for 1991, and the rate may actually be as high as 5,577 per 100,000 depending on the manner in which it is calculated. Johnson, 12.
8. Karl O. Haigler, et al., *Literacy Behind Prison Walls* (Washington: National Center for Education Statistics, 1994).
9. M. Arc, "The Prison 'Culture'- From the Inside," in *Crime and Criminal Justice*, ed. Donald R. Cressey (Chicago: Quadrangle Books, 1971), 164.
10. Arc, 166.
11. Wilbert Rideau and Billy Sinclair, *The Angolite*, Louisiana State Prison, Angola, May-June 1980, 23-24.
12. Arc, 172.
13. *Summary*, Elmira, NY, March 20, 1915, 2.
14. Victor Diaz, interview with author, October 21, 1981.
15. *Mentor*, May-October, 1950, 3.
16. Benjamin Lach, interview with author, June 18, 1980.
17. Robert Russo, interview with author, May 28, 1980.
18. *Corrections Professional*, October 27, 1995.
19. *Good Words*, September 1936, 3.
20. Vic Diaz, interview with author, October 21, 1981.
21. *New Era*, Vol. 2, No. 22, June 25, 1915, 1.
22. *New Era*, Vol. 8, No. 32, September 30, 1921, 1.
23. *Atlantian*, Vol. 3, No. 5, October 1940, 6.
24. Tom Runyon, *In for Life* (New York: WW. Norton & Co., 1953).
25. *New Era*, Vol. 5, No. 36, October 18, 1918, 1.
26. Lou Miller, interview with author, April 20, 1980.
27. Wilbert Rideau, interview with author, June 20, 1980.
28. Dick Haws, "A Prison Paper Portrait," *The Quill*, September 1987, 23.
29. *New Era*, Vol. 8, No. 32, September 30, 1921, 1.

30. Wendy Zentz, “We’re Not Practicing Suicidal Journalism,” United Press International, June 8, 1986.

31. Zentz.

32. *Corrections Magazine*, Vol. vii, No. 4, June 1981.

33. Ron Hoelzer, interview with author, April 20, 1980.

34. *Jefftown Journal*, Vol. 2, No. 1, January 1980, 11.

35. Zentz.

36. Galen Moon, “The Penal Press ... a Symposium,” *Prison World*, January-February, 1951, 6.

37. Wilbert Rideau, interview with author, June 20, 1980.

38. Justice Marshall, *Procunier, Corrections Director, et al. v. Martinez et al.* 416 U.S. 428.

39. “Acid & Ink,” *Time*, July 20, 1962, 78.

Chapter 1

1. Howard (pen name for Joseph D. Fay), *A Disquisition on Imprisonment for Debt as the Practice Exists in the State of New York* (New York: Charles Wiley & Co., 1818), 4.

2. Merrill Jensen, *The New Nation: A History of the U.S. During the Confederation, 1781-1789* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1950), 140.

3. Marimus Willett to De Witt Clinton, March 11, 1790, Columbia University Library, New York, NY.

4. I. N. Phelps Stokes, *The Iconography of Manhattan Island* (New York, 1926), Vol. 5, 1263.

5. Peter J. Coleman, *Debtors and Creditors in America: Insolvency, Imprisonment for Debt, and Bankruptcy* (Madison: State Historical Society of Wisconsin, 1974), 117.

6. *Forlorn Hope*, Vol. 1, No. 1, March 24, 1800, 1.

7. *Forlorn Hope*, Vol. 1, No. 1, March 24, 1800, 1. The letter also appeared in the subsequent March 31, 1800, edition.

8. Keteltas told his readers that he believed it worthwhile to print “republication of memorable event, historical & c...” *Forlorn Hope*, Vol. 1, No. 9 May 24, 1800, 1.

9. *Forlorn Hope*, Vol. 1, No. 8, May 17, 1800, 1.

10. *Forlorn Hope*, Vol. 1, No. 11, June 7, 1800, 3.

11. *Forlorn Hope*, Vol. 1, No. 14, June 28, 1800, 2.

12. *Forlorn Hope*, Vol. 1, No. 3, April 7, 1800, 2

13. *Forlorn Hope*, Vol. 1, No. 4, April 19, 1800, 2.

14. One address seems to be that of an attorney’s office, perhaps a friend; the other is that of his printer.

15. *Forlorn Hope*, Vol. 1, No. 3, April 7, 1800, 3. The address to which readers “enquire” is the same as one of the two addresses to which one was directed to send subscriptions.

16. *Forlorn Hope*, Vol. 1, No. 4, April 19, 1800, 4.

17. *Forlorn Hope*, Vol. 1, No. 10, May 31, 1800, 2.

18. *Forlorn Hope*, Vol. 1, No. 18, July 26, 1800, 3.

19. *Forlorn Hope*, Vol. 1, No. 10, May 31, 1800, 3.

20. *Forlorn Hope*, Vol. 1, No. 17, July 19, 1800, 3.

21. Robert D. Arbuckle, *Pennsylvania Speculator and Patriot: The Entrepreneurial John Nicholson, 1757-1800* (University Park: Pennsylvania State University Press, 1975), 2.

22. Arbuckle, 187.

23. William Wood, who provided this description, was an actor and comedian who spent seventy days in the prison. Arbuckle, 193.

24. *Supporter, or Daily Repast*, May 27, 1800.
25. *Diary of Elizabeth Drinker*, ed. Elaine Forman Crane (Boston: Northeastern University Press, 1991), Vol. 2, 1307.
26. *Prisoner of Hope*, Vol. 1, No. 2, May 10, 1800, 1.
27. *Prisoner of Hope*, Vol. 1, No. 2, 2.
28. *Daily Advertiser*, May 17, 1800.
29. *Forlorn Hope*, Vol. 1, No. 8, May 17, 1800, 1.
30. *Daily Advertiser*, May 17, 1800.
31. *Forlorn Hope*, Vol. 1, No. 8, May 17, 1800, 1.
32. *Forlorn Hope*, Vol. 1, No. 8, May 17, 1800, 1.
33. *Forlorn Hope*, Vol. 1, No. 16, July 12, 1800, 3.
34. William Keteltas to Robert P. Livingstone, September 30, 1812, New York Historical Society, New York City.

Chapter 2

1. Blake McKelvey, *American Prisons: A History of Good Intentions* (Montclair, NJ: Patterson Smith, 1977), 1.
2. Corinne Bacon, ed., *Prison Reform* (New York: H.W. Wilson Co., 1917), 12.
3. McKelvey, 23.
4. Alice Felt Tyler, *Freedom's Ferment: Phases of American Social History to 1860* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1944), 271.
5. S. J. Barrows, *The Reformatory System in the United States* (Washington: Government Printing Office, 1900), 2.
6. McKelvey, 89.
7. Brockway, "The Ideal of True Prison System for a State," repr. in Brockway, *Fifty Years of Prison Service*, 389.
8. Brockway, 133.
9. McKelvey, 91.
10. Joseph R. Chandler, "The Question of a Prison Newspaper," *Transactions of the National Congress on Penitentiary and Reformation Discussion Held at Cincinnati, Ohio, 1870*, ed. Enoch Wines (Albany: Argus Co. 1871), 299.
11. Chandler, 300.
12. Chandler, 303.
13. Isabel Barrows, "Periodicals in Reformatories and Prisons," in *Correction and Prevention*, 1910, 236.
14. R. W. McClaughry, *Proceedings of the Annual Congress of the National Prison Association of U.S.* (Indianapolis: Wm. B. Burford Press, 1905), 52.
15. *Proceedings*, 1905, footnote, 60.
16. *Annual Report*, 1884, printed at the Elmira Reformatory, p. 17.
17. "Allan Nevins has described this period as 'the emergence of modern America,' and perhaps the dominant emergent pattern was an increasingly standardized national way of life," Alan Trachtenberg, *Democratic Vistas: 1860-1880* (New York: George Braziller, 1970), 1.
18. Chandler, 305.
19. Chandler, 306.
20. Chandler, 308.
21. Chandler, 309.
22. Chandler, 310.

23. *Proceedings*, 1905, footnote, 60.

24. Brockway, 133.

Chapter 3

1. Z. R. Brockway, "Beginning of Prison Reform in America," *Charities* 13: 437-44, February 4, 1905, reprinted in Corinne Bacon, ed., *Prison Reform* (New York: H.W. Wilson, 1917), 22.
2. Alexander W. Pisciotta, *Benevolent Repression: Social Control and the American Reformatory-Prison Movement* (New York: New York University Press, 1994), 14.
3. Pisciotta, 17.
4. Pisciotta, 102.
5. Pisciotta, 79.
6. McKelvey, 132.
7. McKelvey, 134.
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21. *Summary*, Vol. 3, No. 33, November 15, 1885, 1. This is nine years before the violent Pullman strike.
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25. Brockway, 264.
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